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AMETHYST

A JOURNAL FOR LESBIANS AND GAY MEN



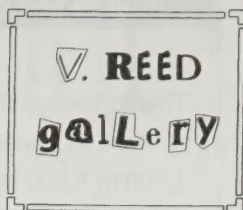
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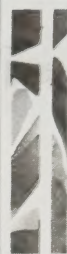
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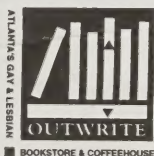
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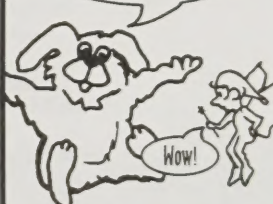
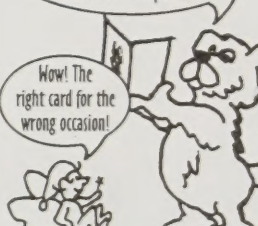
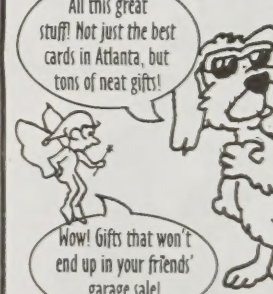


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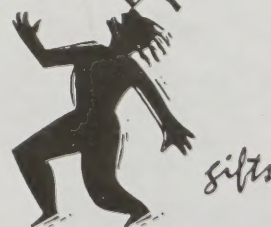
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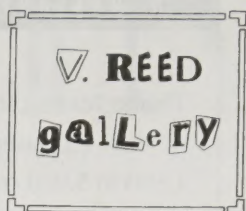
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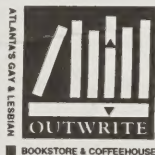
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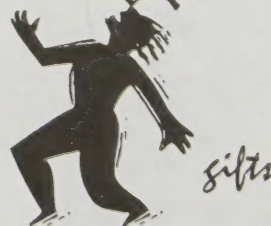
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This issue of **AMETHYST**

is dedicated to

R. Leigh (Tré) Johnson

who lost his battle

with AIDS this spring.



Inclusion by Tim Wilkerson

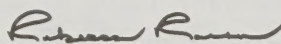
a message from the editors

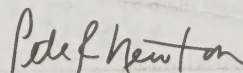
Thanks for reading **AMETHYST**. Now in our ninth year, we have increased our national circulation from 1,500 to 5,000 copies. If you have read **AMETHYST** before, you will notice that we have changed our format but have retained our characteristic literary journal design. We look forward to an even larger circulation for our next issue.

We are always seeking short-shorts and short stories, poems, novel excerpts, play excerpts, photographs and other visual artwork.

We would value hearing your opinions and suggestions about **AMETHYST** or any of the work included in this and other issues. Please drop us a note if you have comments or if you would like to suggest any ideas or theme for an upcoming issue.

Our goal at **AMETHYST** is to create positive social change through art for everyone, especially members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.


Rebecca Ranson


Peter Newton

AMETHYST #16

will be
by,
for
and about
gay
and
lesbian
youth,
ages 16 to 26.

Look for it this October.



Southeastern Arts, Media & Education Project, Inc.
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on the cover:

Untitled

by Teresa M. Sims

Taken at Waterfront Park
in Charleston, South Carolina,
1995

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AMETHYST welcomes all submissions.

Submissions of writing should be typed and double spaced.
Fiction, non-fiction and essays should be limited to approximately
2500 words. Poetry should be limited to five poems not to
exceed 300 lines. Visual art or photographs must reproduce well in
black and white. All submissions should include a brief biographical
statement and be accompanied by a SASE.

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Our thanks, in advance.

PROTECTION

Tuscaloosa

i keep my condoms and k y
in the same drawer
as my 380
next to the bed

its small my brother said
but it'll stop a man
in his tracks
if you need to use it

the klan still flourishes here
really
they call me up
regularly

i've shot it a few times
on a friend's farm
the rubbers get even
less use

the slippery thin sheath
unlike the slick black steel
provides little comfort
from the certain fate

tuscaloosa

Tuscaloosa

DIRTY OLD MAN

Christopher Thomas

He had a certain fear
of lapless dreams,
where the hairless skin
of young boys
sang sonnets
hard as steel.

He loved their small bodies
sunning on the lawn.
He dreamed they were sulking,
preparing to strip
to the perfect dimples
on their bronze bellies

and dive like tongues
in the mill pond,
behind the woodshed,
where he watched them
each day at noon.
At the center of his dream

he would touch them
soft as pink crane wings,
alive with ghosts
and full-bellied.
His mouth would warm

like a bandage
white-winged with tobacco chew.
"Enough!" he would say,
like a twig declaring its doom,
and he'd head back for the house
wearing his skin alone.

Christopher Thomas



External by Tim Wilkerson

STILL LIFE

Jeanne M. Leiby

I want to bury my sister's blue eyes
out behind the house,
behind the rose trellis in the plot of land
my father calls the vineyard.

But I am afraid my sister's blue eyes will sprout,
grow vines and soft fruit of their own,
bunches of blue eyes harvested by my father,
arranged on red velvet. Blue eyes draped
over the edge of a clear crystal bowl,
resting next to three wax apples and a vase
of wilted sun lilies.

Blue eyes are made perfect and blue
on evenings when my mother paints our still lives,
wears only my father's sweat-stained work shirt.
She chews on her paintbrush and steps back
to admire her work. For my sister, I will bury
blue eyes so she can see beyond the still life
beauty into the brown rot of the world,
so blue eyes will not hang forever
in the once blank space above the kitchen table.



Untitled by Teresa M. Sims

THE DRESSING ROOM

Jeanne M. Leiby

Mom's cotton underwear is stained and ripped
There's a run in the seat of her nylons
My legs itch

She tells me again how she picks the ugliest dresses
she can find so her only choice will be the white silk
tea length laden with pearls
that windchime beneath the air vent,
the dress she wants but cannot afford, the one
she will convince me to convince her to buy.

I spy a straight pin
Push the point under my nail
Finger paint a thin red vein
on white silk

Like water color on wet paper, it bleeds.
She should know to say: Don't be afraid
of my birthmarks, the ones on my shoulder
and thigh. Don't be afraid of the soft scarred
skin around my waist. The world will wear you differently.
She is beautiful in white silk
and confused by the stain.
Go see if they have another my size
They do, but I lie

Jeanne M. Leiby

HAWAII KAI

(for Tonia and Jen)

Jeff Mann

This is no bar for old men, or at least those over thirty. Amidst that sensual music, I sculpt my accustomed pose, leather Heathcliff in the corner, beard nuzzling the beer bottle-neck. A dance floor packed with youth, those grinding generations, and all I notice in the neurotic mysteries of magnetism is one man, still carded no doubt, lithe and grinning in the circle of mirrors his charisma creates. Jaw stubble, tight black t-shirt, chest and bicep swell — the constellation that has seized me for pushing twenty years. Age or glasses or hairline, karma or pride always lend me the cloak of invisibility, spectator status, and in these corners some wisdom must have come. Before I ever entered a bar,

I was pouring over Plato. At eighteen, clutching my tequila, shouldering my first leather jacket, I must have believed on such a dance floor, in such a cellar bar, in some Byronic beer haze the Beloved would appear, I would feed at last on Form, the mesmerism of black t-shirts and chest hair would lean to Truth, a love of Soul. In twenty years,

one must learn something. Tonight I judge with a dulled predatory eagerness he is the vain sort who will soon sweatily unpeel, and so he does, the fur I'd hoped for curling finely like dark grainfields across his chest. The disco light strokes his torso, then leaps into me, into the cells of the retina, eyes consuming what civilized fingers and well-bred tongue cannot. Partnered with his reflection, before the long wall mirror he dances, and I order another beer. I am young enough still to envy and to yearn, but yearning now is cut with caution, the way the Greeks used to water down wine. I am old enough to know this is the black horse tugging towards a beauty very far from truth. Most men so handsome live only for walling mirrors - the broad back turns away at dawn, the phone stays silent, the husk of crystal hangs ashiver in breeze. The spider's attention span is brief.

If only kindness were an aphrodisiac. What has he suffered, what has he learned, as beautiful as that? I am old enough not to act. I tip my beer back, I leave the displacements of disco, black strobe lights and lust,

and enter mid-April's chill, the silent way larch is greening, soft rupture of needles I brush my beard against, the simplicity with which Bradford pear buffs its leaf-hearts maturing after the vapid bloom. Twenty years leaving bars alone. Learn to love smaller things — the spices in mulled wine, biscuits beneath honey, a country music tape, a coffeecake, the pyromania of maples in October. Respect the slow shift from igneous to metamorphic, stones made symmetrical by long weathering. Learn to love those who have suffered. And learn to know

the amanitas, those pearly columns, those angelic cupolas, how to recognize poisonous species of snake - the heat-seeking face pit, the arrow-shaped head, the scale patterns of the cottonmouth, the diamondback. How they fascinate. How every intoxicant

is one sip shy of poison. How a man polluted with need masked as aesthetic shuffles like a sleepwalker, in the desperation too many days of desert breed, towards the distant glint of water, bends at last to gulp. Bends over water too turbid for reflection, water with a tell-tale reek only experience can recognize. Wakes to brothers' bones scattered in the bank-mud, or wakes simply to a mouthful of sand and knows

he can trust no thirst again.

SILK AND APPLE PIE

Terry Hook

Her silk dress lay on the carpet,
Entwined hastily in Morgan's denim jumper.
Erin lovingly caressed her farm-fleshed back,
Kissed the nape of her neck and revealed
In the smell of freshly-made woman.

Morgan hummed a happy affirmation,
Wriggled warm and delicious against the contours
Of Erin's city-satin shoe-girl softness.
Enraptured as spoons tucked deep
In Grandma's quilt-clad posterbed,
They slept in a blanket of tenderness.

Jeff Mann

Terry Hook

SOFT COTTON

Janell Moon

I loved my baby brother.
I would let him follow me
everywhere. I liked the
sight of him, his curly hair.

I meant to keep him safe.
He told me I was his blue blanket.
He was warmer when I was near.
He felt me through the painted wall.

Now my brother sits on a worn out mattress
picking at the buttons. He shivers.
I ask the man to give him a blanket
but he puts his finger around his neck
showing me the danger.

My brother's swollen hand comes toward me
reaching for my jacket. I want to lie down
with him in soft cotton.

SHADOWS

Janell Moon

I am afraid of what
she is afraid of

she warns me she'll want sex
schedule it to suit her
make me cook for her
the way she likes it
take the fish and throw it back
storm around
make rain

guess she hasn't smelled
the swamp mud on me
lightening in my fingertips
thunder in my chest
puddle splasher
people eater
serve up broken glass

she tells me she's difficult
I think witches, flying bats,
good match.

WOMAN WITH A CLEAVER

Janell Moon

This room I know,
the crack down the pale blue paint,
a razor line,
holds the tale of your anger
the midnight I tell you
I don't want to stay —

it's too confining for me here,
the windows see no sky —
only the laundry hanging from the line —
red underwear, Long Johns we called them
when I was young peeking on back lines
on Monday afternoons, our mother's washday,
for a hint of bodies and sex —

nothing stays the same, the rules all change,
don't want to touch you please,

even the cat comes uninvited
through the open window,
sits on me, my sadness.
I want no one to watch me,
push away purr and need,
don't want to be nice anymore,

want water, air, and desert jeeps, open empty spaces,

want you to let me be ...

can't stay in this room,
the air's all full of too much chatter.
I'm tired of how to do things right —
clean the fish, get rid of the jaw, the eye,
a chop, chop, chop,
a wipe away, see how good I do —
don't care, just can't stay here,
dry blood stains the cold slabbed ice,

can't hear their cries — their mouths gone.

Janell Moon

SAMMY, MAMA, AND THE REST

John Howard

A creative non-fiction

We had just returned from dinner. There was one message on the answering machine. Though I had not seen her or talked to her in three years, since our ten-year high school reunion, I recognized her slow, crackling drawl immediately.

"Jooooooooooooohn?" Three syllables. "This is Deana." Of course it was Deana. What could she want?

"I guess you've heard the news by now. Isn't it awful? I just can't believe Sammy's dead. I was wondering if you were coming home for the funeral. Give me a call. Bye."

I hadn't heard the news.

"Sammy." The sound escaped from my mouth in a low, long, otherworldly tremor, loud it must have been. My body began to collapse, fold up. My shoulders, my entire upper body, sank into my mid-section, and I fell out of my desk chair, a heap on the floor.

Then the spasms came. I coughed out sobs, crying over and over again, "Sammy, Sammy, Sammy." I was dizzy; my vision blurred. Books arrayed on shelves, piled in stacks - brightly colored, new paperbacks and faded hardcover dust-jackets — melded into a drippy rainbow, a soft-focus kaleidoscope. I felt someone, Edmond, behind me, kneeling close, his chest and stomach pressed firmly against my back, his arms around me, head on my shoulder. He didn't ask who had called, he didn't ask what was wrong. He said nothing. He just held on tight. I don't know that I had ever been so wholly consumed by grief. I don't know that I had ever been comforted in this way. It felt awkward and right.

I had to call my mother for the details. She didn't have many.

"They're not saying much. Estelle told me that the people at his office got worried when he didn't show up for work on Monday and didn't call in. Tuesday morning they had the landlord go into his apartment with a friend. They found him."

"So what was the cause?"

"They don't know. Or they're not saying. But I do know the funeral won't be 'til Saturday, because they have to do an autopsy before they can fly the body back."

"An autopsy? What are they looking for? Was it maybe a heart attack?" I asked hopefully.

"I just don't know. Maybe it was drugs."

I hated that. My mother had a way of making everything about drugs. If so-and-so's daughter shoplifted, she must have been on drugs. If anyone, especially a young person, stepped off the straight and narrow, if he picked up and left town without so much as a word as to why, if he bashed mail boxes with a baseball bat or blew them up with M-80's, if he hung out on Saturday evenings in the bank parking lot, if he stopped attending services on Sunday mornings, if he did anything slightly unorthodox so as to relieve the unrelievable boredom of life in Brandon, Mississippi, my mother could put the world right again, make the complex simple, with her pat conclusion, "He must have been on drugs."

But damnit she might be on target in this case. One of the last times we spoke by phone, Sammy confided in me that he had been having some problems. Maybe my disbelief, my shock prevented me from giving solid, friendly advice. I was not a good listener. I'm sure I glossed over it, brushed it off with a chin-up, better times ahead kind of forecast. I used a mildly insincere optimism with him, not allowing him to speak his peace. What he did say was this: "I began to get very desperate. My dealer disappeared so there were nights when I wandered around Alphabet City looking for crack. That's why I moved out here to San Francisco."

"I knew that move to San Francisco would only amount to trouble," my mother said to me over the phone. She loves insinuation.

"Mother," I said, "I'm not going to go into that with you right now. Listen, are you sure you're telling me everything you know?"

"They're not talking," she said, "and I'm not asking."

I broke down at only one point in the conversation with my mother. I fixated on an envelope on my desk. I had opened and read the letter some time ago, but left it in my prescribed place, with several others — the ones I had yet to respond to. The postmark read "España." A friend overseas. I fiddled at the red and blue edging with my letter opener, ripping the lightweight

paper neatly along the crease until the envelope was almost halved. I realized what I was doing, realized I had lost my train of thought, remembered the tragedy, and blurted out, "Mama, I just can't believe it." The same idiotic remark Deana had left on my machine.

Edmond drew close, as tears pooled on the glass top. He ran his hand over my arm.

"It's mighty sad," my mother said curtly, steeling herself, shutting herself off that way I knew so well.

A silence of perhaps minutes passed.

"Look," she said, "Mrs. Jones wants you to be a pallbearer. Are you able to come? Will you be able to compose yourself?"

Deep, angry resentment was building in me. She knew I could compose myself. After all, she had raised me. I was the perfect automaton. And the question was not was I able to come. Of course, I was able. What she wanted to know was would I come. I suspected she didn't want me to.

"I will be there," I said flatly.

Now, I tried a roundabout way to broach what I knew would be an even more contentious subject.

"Mom, didn't they build a new Days Inn out there on 20?" Ethnic diversity, beyond simple black and white, had come to my hometown in the form of motel operators, the Patels.

"Yes, she offered. 'Why?'"

"Because I'm gonna plan on staying there."

"What? Why aren't you going to stay here with us like you always do?"

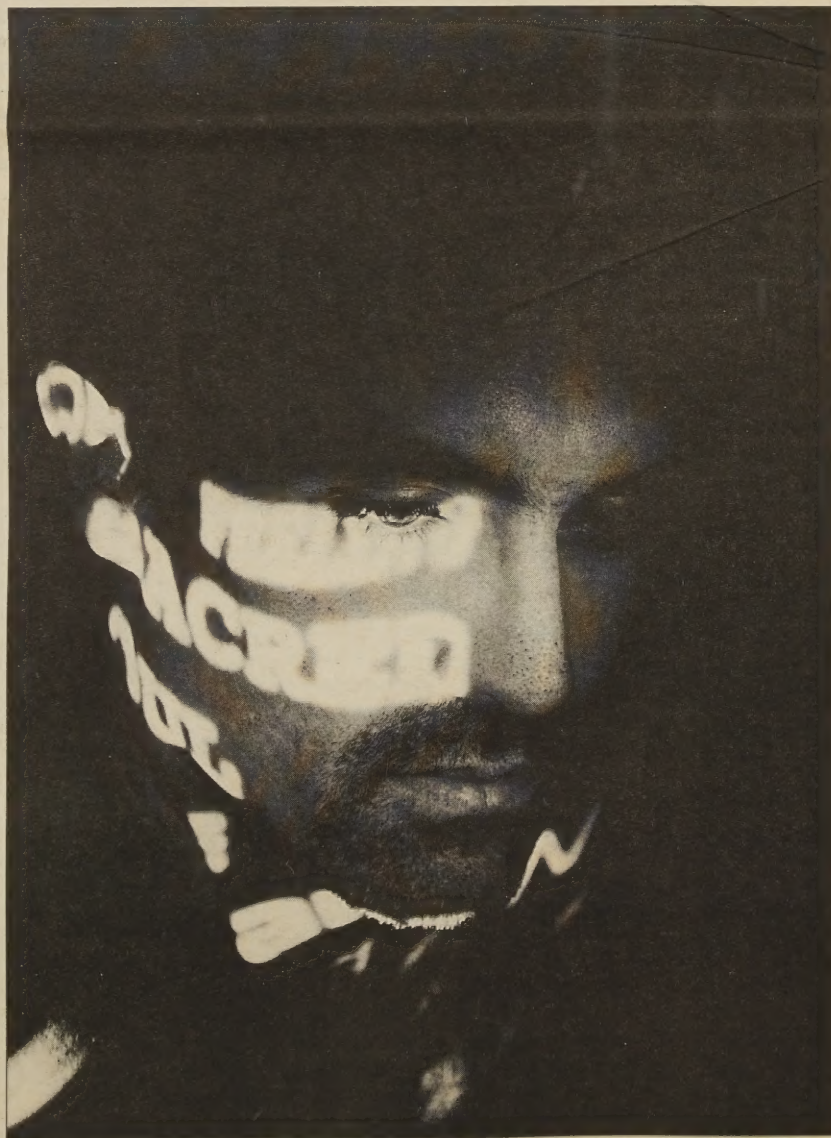
"Because I'll be bringing my partner with me." Partner was a bit strong. Edmond and I had known each other for all of two months. But it looked promising.

A long silence. Then:

"John Howard, you are not going to do any such thing. How dare you? How dare you upstage Mrs. Jones in her time of grief?"

There it was. There, in its most unadorned, bleak directness, was my mother's worldview. All the world was indeed a stage. Appearances were everything. And so help her god, the performance, the death ritual, would go off without a hitch. The town's collective pity would properly rest on Mrs. Jones and her derelict son, not Betty Howard and hers.

Then, she said it. It's amazing really how mothers — mine anyway — can insure that their children come to understand the depths of sadness. At those times when you think you can't possibly feel any worse, they say something to take you



Inner Vision by Tim Wilkerson

down even further into the mire — life's meanest, ugliest revelations — the encounters with the aloneness of being. Moms as existential tutors.

She said, with great finality and resolve, "Well I think you should just stay in Atlanta!"

Too pissed off to let the hurt slow me, I fired back like this:

"Mom, I'm coming to this funeral because Mrs. Jones asked me to be a pallbearer and because Sammy was my friend, not yours. I'm bringing Edmond with me because I'm in pain, and he's a support to me. But I promise you this, from now on, I will stay in Atlanta. This will be my last trip to Brandon."

Click.

When Sammy Jones entered the second grade at Daisy McLaurin Elementary School, most students thought he was a freak. He had an outlandish crew cut, he wore tacky polyester hand-me-downs, he said not a word. And, he was fat. And, he was smart. He had skipped first grade. Such was the way to deal with gifted and talented children in Brandon, Mississippi in 1969.

I knew Sammy. The pew where his family sat on Sunday mornings was right behind ours. His mother and my father had gone to school together in Brandon. Our grandmothers, who lived in white clapboard-sided houses next door to each other on College Street, spent their time comparing notes on the two of us, a practice that would become more competitive as the years went by. I knew Sammy to be shy but warm, analytical — even at age six — but gentle.

The caretaker's love I felt for him then turned into an awe for his intellect, a reverence for his good taste in music and politics, as we grew up together. Even after we both went off to college out of state — the only two in our class to do so — we traded opinions over the phone and in letters. I think maybe, in retrospect, he valued my views as much as I did his. But for me, Sammy was the final arbiter of the refined and the gauche, the authentic and the fake, the good and the bad.

In October of 1987, it came time for me to tell Sammy about the miraculous change of course my life had taken. It was time to come out. We met for lunch in Chinatown in Washington, my adopted home. He had come down from New York to visit some friends. And as these things go, I wavered, the opportune moment never presented itself.

Yet the moment came, a week later. At the national March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights, among a sea of faces, a mass of hundreds of thousands of queers, I spotted Sammy. How could I have doubted? How could I not have known? Sammy wouldn't judge me. He was queer too. We hugged and introduced our companions to one another. We laughed at our reluctance, our common path. We parted, and enjoyed the day with those people close to us, those we knew best.

That was one of life's great moments, a tipping of the scales ever so slightly toward belief in the worthiness of living. You know, it's a decision we make every day, a weighing of alternatives. Do life's miseries so vastly exceed the occasional glimmers of happiness or mere interest that we logically choose to end it all, exit stage left? Or do the good times, though lesser in duration, surpass in intensity all the world's colossal ills? Often, things are going so well, the question isn't even posed. The decision is made *ex post facto*. We get out of bed, an unconscious affirmation of life. But if the nadir in relations with my family was yet to come, if the heartbreak of loves lost was going to get only more weary with time, if I was to lose one of my dearest friends and countless others before they ever glimpsed middle age, I would need to be able to look back at this moment as a big chit in the plus column of my existence.

An earnest young minister of liberal sentiments, a man who had never known Sammy, delivered a soothing eulogy. Afterward, I rode with Edmond to the cemetery, a highway parcel adjacent to a discount furniture store, a clear-cut field with bland headstones flush to the ground to ease mowing. Small groups of mourners milled over patches of grass that, like a threadbare rug, scarcely concealed the parched red dirt beneath. I joined several other men named Jones. We hoisted the bulky coffin from a Cadillac hearse and carried it to the edge of a rectangular hole in the ground that had been carpeted over. How did Estelle Jones carry herself during the last minutes of the ceremony? What visible clues to her mental state did she give off under that funeral home tent as her youngest son was turned over to god and the earth? For the life of me, I can't remember. I can only recall the pitifully unnecessary comment Deana offered as I walked back to Edmond's Ford explorer: "Some people ought to be ashamed. You and I are the only old classmates of his to show up."

Through it all, my father, ever the gentleman, tended to Edmond — not out of a sense of maintaining decorum, not to minimize conflict on the sad occasion. Rather out of a spirit of decency. Edmond was among strangers, and Dad was impelled to make him feel at home. Dad insisted Edmond join us for lunch back at the house, before the two of us returned to Atlanta.

Good manners inevitably foster such anxiety-filled situations. Still, I knew we could all pull through the ordeal. Mom had prepared a large meal, as the day required. Adding another place at the table was hardly a problem, though she secretly seethed inside. Serving dishes were passed with exaggerated care and politeness, as I watched the continuing transformation of the rural Mississippi farm girl; the selfless housewife who had brought me into the world; the aspiring civic and social leader who had patiently responded to my perpetual pre-school questioning, who had with graceful deliberateness demonstrated to me how to write the letters of the alphabet, long before Spock-era infants were expected to learn. I watched the now aging, unyielding woman who on another scorching summer day a few years prior,

after two hours of my most well-reasoned arguments and final-honed explanations, cried out to me in near hysteria, "I am a United Methodist woman, and I can never, never accept it."

Edmond and I ate our fill, and soon changed out of our suits. We sat down in the den determined to pass an appropriate amount of time visiting with my parents, before departing my childhood home for the very last time, before leaving the town where me and Sammy had grown up. My father sat, like Archie Bunker, in his chair. My mother, having loaded the dishwasher, perched straight backed on the couch. I sat next to the strangely quiet television, while across a wide expanse of green shag, Edmond was motionless in Mom's rocking chair.

Dad talked, without prompting, about the weather, about Braves baseball, and while gesturing toward the sliding glass doors, about Miss Bessie Mae Brown's pasture, just across the ditch there, which was about to be turned into a brand new subdivision. I looked at Edmond, who stared back blankly in a stupor, the high fat, high sugar meal already taking its toll. Then, to my horror, I looked into his lap. Sticking out unceremoniously, lazily propped against his thigh, was his long, plump dick, right there for all the world to see. Holy shit, I had told him about not wearing underwear. What if my mother saw this? What if she already had?

I stood bolt upright, and forcefully declared it was time to go. Goodbyes and empty hugs were exchanged in record time. We were out the door and in the car as Edmond, still clueless, struggled to keep up. I told him to punch it, and Brandon receded into the background of my passenger side vanity mirror. Breathless, I gazed in wonder at the startled, frightened immediacy of the expression on my face, not thinking for an instant about my past, not indulging a single moment of nostalgia as we speeded beyond the town limits toward the interstate.

I eventually moved in with Edmond, but it didn't last. I found him cloying and needy; in his view, I was cold and unavailable. Seven months was not bad, though as gay relationships go. Of course, I did return to Brandon, and I still go back about twice a year out of love for my Dad. I've never told my Mama what I found out about Sammy.

You see, as a historian, I've learned, like a good police detective and like many self-aware lesbians and gays, how to uncover sometimes unpleasant but essential truths. Sammy's death is a matter of public record. According to the San Francisco medical examiner's report, cocaine and ephedrine brought my friend's life to an early end. An overdose.

So, that much I know. Those are the facts. But I'm faced with one of history's familiar problems. While we can know with some certainty about particular events, indisputable actions that did or did not occur, they remain open to interpretation because of that elusive element, that wild card, human motivation. Why did Sammy go too far? What propelled him over the edge? These nagging, infuriating, maddening questions leave me with two plausible scenarios.

First, and almost beyond bearing for me, is the notion that Sammy, having reviewed his past and peeked at his future, decided life was a raw deal. Maybe he saw that his time was running out anyway — the medical examiner also found AZT in his room — or perhaps he'd just had enough. But the terror I feel in looking at Sammy's despair, the despair that results in chemical abuse and slow suicide or the horror of a willful choosing of death — all this demands that I accept a second scenario

I insist on thinking that Sammy's overdose was accidental. Sammy must have come home from a hard week's work that Friday afternoon and launched a big party for one. He shot up so much speed that he stayed up right through the night, so that when he went out for some things on Saturday, his neighbor must have noticed a pallor, sure, but one that was offset by his determination to do his errands. Probably late that Saturday night, yeah, early Sunday morning, the lord's day, Sammy pushed against that hard edge, that line. And I imagine Sammy boppin' around his apartment in a frenzy, cleaning like crazy, watching TV one minute, starting a new book the next. Yeah, he put down his book, went to his bed — shaky and rushed, not unhappy — maybe to masturbate. Yeah, that's why he was found naked. He got off, he felt good, he was wound tight with nervous joy. Inside that worldly wise and burdened mind of his, a limit was being reached. He wasn't approaching a white light. No Judeo-Christian ascension for him. Fuck, no. He was spiraling inward and outward, simultaneously, taking one last great amusement park ride, exploding within that cranium. Not splattering his blood with a shotgun all over his bed, all over his walls. Not splashing that beautiful all-seeking head of his in ominous red graffiti. No, goddamnit, Sammy was fucking exploding in ecstasy. From within. I insist on believing that Sammy just ventured on beyond me, he took off for parts unknown, way past my comprehension, like usual, leaving me scrambling to catch up. ■

John Howard

AMETHYST gallery



Images From The Triangle

Viewpoint

by Peter Harvey

The aesthetic and emotional burden of the gay artist has always been a heavy and complex one, but in these recent years its complexities have been ruthlessly simplified and so the burden is increased. I mean, of course, the last ten years and more since AIDS has become a factor in our lives.

As AIDS became what we know it is now, as the grim statistics grew, and as I too, along with so many others, came face to face with direct personal loss, I found two things were happening. First, I was saddened and isolated by the deaths of so many people I had known and worked with in the 60s and 70s — that singular period of sexual and social revolt that produced the Stonewall Riot and of which we are all heirs. To take one example, of the 18 or so men involved in the Broadway milestone *The Boys in the Band*, only the author, three actors, an assistant stage manager and I survive; the rest have died from AIDS. This kind of annihilation of my peers and professional connections led me to work more and more by myself, as a painter rather than theatre designer.

Secondly, I found the shadows of loss and grief soon made me take more seriously my identity within the group of individuals who made up the first victims of this scourge in America. As a gay



Holy Fool

featuring Peter Harvey

man, I felt I needed to make some gesture of solidarity with my community. As an artist, clearly, it was the cultural contributions by other gay artists that had enriched my life, as well as all of Western culture, and had constantly sustained me.

We know we stand on the edge of a new century, but there is so much devastation and loss everywhere and in that blank future ahead, it seems there are few familiar friends or trusted companions to counsel, guide or admonish us. AIDS has taken so many away. The artists who have been in this battle, whose lovers and friends have died, cannot allow themselves to forget, even if they were able to, and do not even begin to want to, for the love that sustains them can only do so with remembering. They have to continue with their art, as they do their lives, cherishing those who have gone in every way possible.

Of course in art, as in life, there is no formula or set method. This is the great challenge and clear message for the gay artist in the 21st century. Somehow we must show that in spite of these incalculable losses, the spirit-diminishing cruelties so many of us have endured, we can continue to create art, whether in music, literature, painting or sculpture, as gay people always have, but now enriched and strengthened by this ordeal.

-Peter Harvey, New York and Green Hill, Rhode Island



Memorial



Four Self-Portraits

ATLANTA

comes out writing

celebrating 11 of Atlanta's poets and fiction writers.

.....

LABOR DAY IN THE CLUBS IN ATLANTA

(for Rory, Melvin, Donald, Gerald, Felix, and the bank played on)

R. Leigh (Tré) Johnson

Chile, you ain't never partied until you've partied with the children for Labor Day in Atlanta . . .

Honey every Trade, Queen, Butchbunny, and Flipflop was on Spring Street from Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Texas and all other points North and West of Mississippi . . .

Girl, I saw people there I hadn't seen in years . . . It was a massive JUKE JOINT JUMPIN, GUITAR PICKIN FAMILY REUNION . . .

But through all the laughter, and all the smiling, the thick aroma of sweaty hungry bodies rubbing up against each other on the dance floor . . . a cold and distant veil of loneliness made its way past all these facades . . . for every one of us was in pain . . .

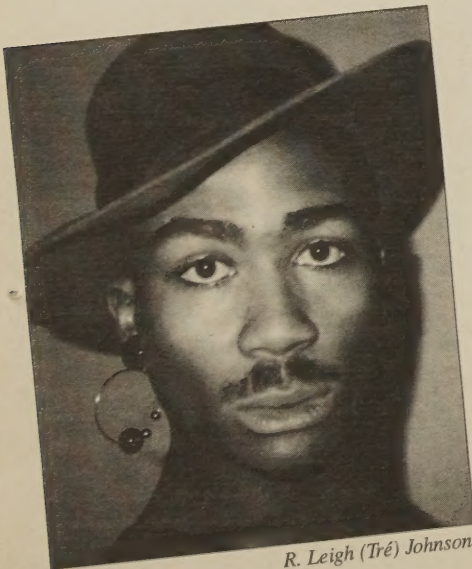
Fighting long and hard to hold back the tears, for so many of our hearts were broken because of our Brothers, Sisters, Friends, and Lovers who were no more . . . they had fought a never ending battle of pain, torture and total devastation and destruction . . .

As the party made its way outside on the humid summer patio, we felt dedication from the Lord for all the brave warriors who had lost the battle and ultimately the fight . . .

The WAR just like an evening storm, each drop symbolizing another casualty GONE . . . then another . . . then another . . .

Could you imagine what this party would have been if none of us were affected or infected by this enemy of AIDS?

KEEP FIGHTING CHILDREN! HOLD ON! THE STORM IS ABOUT TO END! AND A BRAND NEW PARTY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!!!!



R. Leigh (Tré) Johnson

TRÉ

Gail Cohen

I didn't really
know you
Yet word of you fallen
focused me
brought you vividly to mind
but more

Driving you took control
knew all the roads
gave and gave and gave
back to that moment
you read your majestic poem
IV in tact
going onward
gracing us
taking your naps
returning to give again

All I know
is rampant energy has
left this world
an individual
Resplendent
Too young to leave us

I see you
standing on
that battlefield
littered with bodies
I see you
posed regally
Then you too
Fall

noble warriors
living with the inevitable
this battle
must be won

Tre won in
the battle of life
He was an artist
A Poet
He was Himself

R. Leigh Johnson

Gail Cohen

\$250 FOR HEAT, MR. DE WELDON, A BILL NOT PAID SINCE MAY

t. edward gray

(... de Weldon's involvement came about by chance. Last year, Park Project board member Dr. Jesse Peel happened to read in 'Art and Understanding,' a magazine addressing art issues for people dealing with HIV and AIDS, that de Weldon and his organization, Build the Monument Foundation, plan to install a 50 foot tall bronze national monument in Washington, D.C. as an AIDS memorial. The article stated that, given the nation's political climate, the organization was looking for a separate site at which to test public reaction with a smaller similar sculpture. Jesse found de Weldon and eagerly implored, "We've got a great park and we want a sculpture. Could we borrow yours?"

Initially, de Weldon expected to find a vacant lot in Virginia-Highland. Instead, he was taken aback by the beauty of the plaza intended to hold the sculpture. 30306, Volume 2, Number 10, December 1995)

I have no heat in my home,
Mr. de Weldon.
I cannot afford it.
Since my lover died,
I've spent all of my time
paying off a \$48,000 debt
and heat and food are extras
in my home.
Luckily,
I have little food, too.

One less reason for heat.

Over the last two years
I have grown to expect the cold;
November always arrives on time,
and quickly.
74 degrees in the morning, 54 by rush hour.
I never leave the house without a coat,
regardless of hot weather,
hot,
not heat,
and always look for clouds.
Clouds bring rain.
In November, rain brings cold.

A coat is not a cure for cold.

Over the last two years
I have grown to accept the cold;
rain always arrives on time,
and quickly.
Clear in the morning, thunderstorms by rush hour.
Electric blankets and thick comforters
are washed and folded early,
kept neatly by the bed.
A flick of the switch,
instantly, hot.
Not heat,
hot.
Feverish, wet,
not heat,
sweat.
Sweat that soaks the bed,
drowns unpleasant dreams,
stands in pools on my palms and
offers not reflection.

Sweat is not a cure for cold.

Build me a cure with your dry hands,
Mr. de Weldon,
not a cold metal sculpture.
Do not let the heat of my memories
feel icy to the touch.

Instead,
set everything in the park
on fire,

and
let it burn to the ground,
let it burn all evening.
Allow me to stand in the center
of that park as it burns,
next to all the other people
who sweat in empty beds,
wearing coats to ward off winter,
and let us feel

heat,
that heat,
his heat,
just one more time.

In the morning
you will understand.

REBECCA'S WHITE ROSES

M. Charlene Ball

Your white roses, Rebecca,
painted under glass
show me ways of getting, setting
free. She turned to bone, sky, you
slipping from her grasp, turned
inward, learned to be
careful, precise, invisible.
She the dark powerful one, arm laid
possessive across your shoulder, your
hand grasps hers, smiles telling
the camera how your bodies fit.
Two female balloons swelling
with escapade power, you
floated yet stayed bound
to men, played lovers, never seizing
that last terrible freedom.
Beck, your roses lie under glass
pale as white satin, perfect, still.
Was it she, not free, who
could not let you fly? Or
can two ever? Did your dead roses
give her - your red
beating heart turned to white satin -
did you give her, Beck, the sky?
July 1993

* Beck Strand (Rebecca Salisbury James) was Georgia O'Keefe's lover in 1929. Her painting on glass of white artificial roses hangs in the Blumensche Museum in Taos, New Mexico.

MY LARK ASCENDING

Alexi Helligar

if gloomy every for
life to yes as
gay brightly so oh
song a sings who

can he because all beyond why his wings who

dark the from up
soul his lifts who
lark every as
be could I only if

if only I could be
as every lark
who lifts his soul
up from the dark

who wings his why beyond all because he can

who sings a song
oh so brightly gay
as yes to life
for every gloomy if

(after a poem by e.e. cummings)

DEAR GREG

Alexi Helligar

... when I look at you for a moment,
then it is no longer possible for me to speak;
my tongue has snapped,
... I see nothing with my eyes, my ears burn ...

- Sappho

Dear Greg,

Lost to love as one could be
How long before I'd recognize
The man I've pledged to brook
From a place dubious and hungry

Perhaps in the instant that it took
For one spasm of brilliant sight
To pass the space between our look
Filling my addled mind with light

Perhaps in the instant that it took
For sparks to navigate a dark synapse
Or thoughts to lift our tongues with hooks
So they could erect words of conversation

My eyes savored you only two nights ago
Drank you in until they both were full and
Once I probed you with simple invasive art
I found endowments surpassing your beauty

Now I'm drunk to my heart and dazed because of you
Chase you with ears scorched to hear an affirmation
Astonished to arrive at your shore of uncertainty
Without my usual zeal for seeing hearing detaching

Look how my poor wilted words traverse the ether
With one pliant hearing consider to let them rest
Yes even upon the delicate pillow of your breast
To retire from the weight of thirty waiting years

It did not take long to find in you my loneliness
In one fast but significant instant to satiate eyes
For ears dulled by insipidness to unfold lotus flowers
And for every moment since we touched to ripple like forever

Alexi

14 February 1995

Alexi Helligar

AMICALOLA WATER FALL

Dagmar Jill Spisak

The Cherokee call it Tumbling Water.
Seven hundred feet of cascading
light falls over black granite. My daughter
is dancing along a ledge almost wading

and we too are dancing in a calmer way
than that young spirit with her flute
at the edge of the precipice spotted with day
light. You rest in a well formed tree root,

and as I turn laughing you are tugging
me into your arms yet still dancing
to the roaring music, hugging
the water in us. The prancing

child, now a woman, dances the path toward
her own light, her own reward.

TOO LATE FOR MY MOTHER

Dagmar Jill Spisak

You are: a ring, a stone, lost
mornings of sleep, a leaf
that will not be seen this year,
a mutter of aid, a voice,

the shocked recognition
that hangs in the air
between an echoing abyss
and a yard full of blue jays.

Dagmar Jill Spisak



Portrait by Van Buren Colley-1948

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Alexi Helligar

if gloomy every for
life to yes as
gay brightly so oh
song a sings who

can he because all beyond why his wings who

dark the from up
soul his lifts who
lark every as
be could I only if

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as every lark
who lifts his soul
up from the dark

who wings his why beyond all because he can
who sings a song
oh so brightly gay
as yes to life
for every gloomy if

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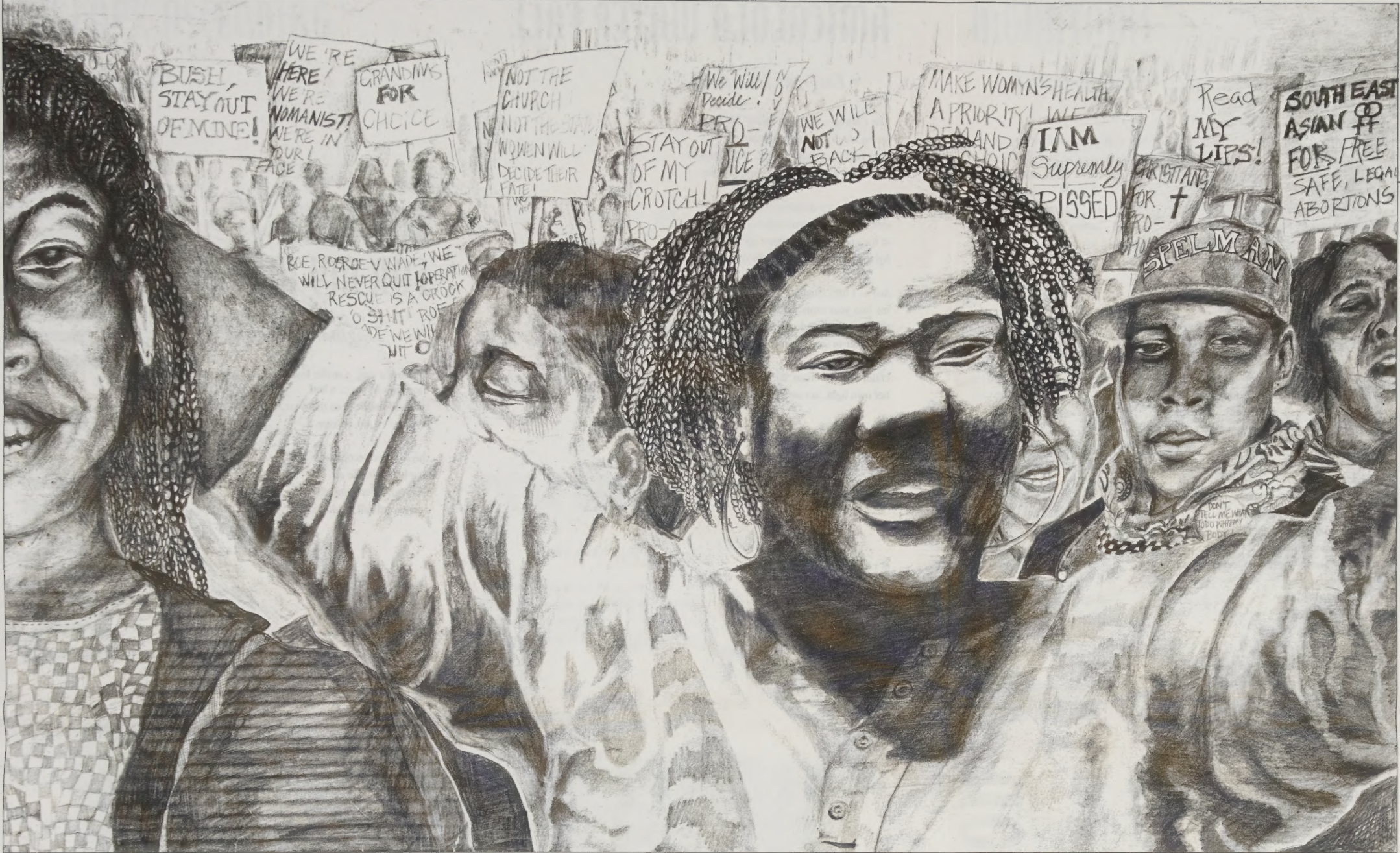
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14 February 1995

Alexi Helligar



AMETHYST gallery

featuring Wendi O'Neal



THE RECOGNITION SCENE

Terence E. Jackson

I am the hated and the beloved
I am the seed and the bread
I am the truth and the unknown
It is the darkness
That speaks to me in tongues
And when it calls you best answer

Faggot
Pussy
Cocksucker

It is the darkness
That speaks to me in tongues
And when it calls you best answer
I awoken from the twilight of sleep
Recognizing their twisted melody
Calling out
Feed me
Feed me

Scorched is my throat
Tense is my body
Up up up and out I go
Down streets that have no names
Looking for signs of recognition in their eyes
It is late
I pass you our eyes meet
I have become the offerer
And the offering
As I find myself standing once again
On the paved roads
Where signs read: Sodom

You who have lain with men
Abomination
You women whom lay with women
Abomination
Thank God for AIDS
You are the offspring of the Sodomites

I am neither cold nor lonely
Are my footsteps
Walking recognizing
The invisible paths that we had taken
Allowing myself to be led
By the spirit
Looking for signs of recognition
I am the offerer and the offering
My footsteps no longer alone

There was no doubt in my mind
About what he wanted
I could see it in his eyes
The way he checked out my crotch
As he stood by the car
I could see it in his eyes
Being led by the spirit
Away from prying eyes
We are moving
Passing
Moving and passing the house
Saying
Bring out your guests
So that we may know them better
We are moving away from prying eyes

Dicks
Tits
Ass

I knew I knew
Yes I knew what he wanted
I have always known what they wanted
checking out my crotch
As he stood by the car
These were signs of recognition
We were prepared to complete this ritual
We are overcome
Being driven mad
By our own roughness
Our penis' rising to the love for which we need
Our nostrils stung by manhood
Touching tasting with eager tongues
Our emotions walk us further to the edge
Until we feel the penetrating power
Pushing Opening
We are possessed by the spirit
Unconscious of who we were
Only of what we'd become
Running down the street
That had no name
Until I found myself
At the graves of those who had gone on
I touch the stones
Covered in blood
And I remember
I remember you

We are rising to the love we need
We are rising to the love we need
One morning
I cried brother
Go down to the well
Be quick to the wind
Don't tarry
Don't slow
My throat is like a desert
And my head so full of woe
I fear that my maker
Will soon knock at my door

Terence E. Jackson

MOUNTAINS

Christine Carroll

You were far from home in Italy when you wrote
"Dad, I know now what mountains really are,
Jagged crests,
Crooked roads,
They zig all the way up
And zag all the way down."
Thousands of miles across the sea came your letter
To rest in a cardboard box.
Dozens of years later
I read your words.

I thought then of the later mountains
You stumbled on,
Doubt,
depression,
And fear becoming
Mountains of bottles.

You left me alone.
It could have been thousands of miles
Or just across the living room.

We cannot know the future.
We try to know the past.
We may regret it.
We cannot change it.

You didn't know about the unsurmountable ridges
Or your brown-eyed daughter.

I never knew the boy on the mountaintop
Who wrote
"We are camped in an olive grove.
We are winning the war.
I am climbing mountains."

Christine Carroll



Jim Grimsley

When the door opens Roy is holding his algebra book before him like a shield. He grips the cover, which features a series of black and purple triangles on a field of burnt sienna. Roy's expression makes Nathan immediately cautious. "I told you I was coming over. Did you forget?"

"No." Nathan stands.

"Can't I come in?"

"Sure."

Roy enters and cautiously sits on the bed. He sets out his books in a way that designates a place for Nathan beside him. The math book falls open. Soon Roy is writing in his firm hand on the notebook beside Nathan's thigh. He denotes equations in letters and numbers, illuminating each in pencil as he describes their arcane meanings and functions. Roy speaks to Nathan as to a peer and not as to a younger boy. Algebra is simple. You learn to work from both sides of the equation, to find the answer implied by circumstance. He sets out problems which become increasingly clear, reading from the math book about the price of yellow and green ribbon in Mr. Sawyer's department store, about the number of nickels in \$1.97 if there are four quarters and six dimes. Finding a solution for the problem, as Roy explains it, requires a peculiar and inexorable logic. Enlightenment comes to Nathan at the same time that Roy's presence begins to have its usual effect on him. The principles of algebra break over Nathan like day. What has not before been known — the undiscovered element in any circumstance — may be ferreted out, exposed to light. Nathan watches Roy's hands on the pages, his brows knit together as he reads. There is an unknown here in this room. X and Y hang in the air between them.

Roy lets Nathan solve a word problem himself, leaning close to watch and explain. Again with his nearness comes that field of magnetism that possesses Nathan, arousing even the blood in his belly. Roy watches calmly from his side of the equal sign. He has moved close now, his breath touches Nathan along the soft of the throat. No logic can explain such warmth. Roy sets down his pencil and Nathan touches the veins on the back of Roy's hand. The contact shocks them both. Roy is quiet. Shy, like Nathan. But neither hand moves.

Nathan watches Roy's hands on the pages, his brows knit together as he reads. There is an unknown here in this room. X and Y hang in the air between them.

Roy leans close till his forehead brushes Nathan's, dark hair tickling, his eyes downcast. The rhythms of their separate breathings merge into one river. No other sound intrudes as they lean against each other, skull to skull. Nathan feels the unknown rising in them both, its message plainer than either can fathom. Roy cups his warm hand against Nathan's neck. Roy's breathing deepens, reaches inside. Now both his hands are trembling.

Roy is starved for closeness. Nathan leans against him since it seems it is warmth that he craves. But the effect is out of proportion; it is as if he has cracked Roy's shell. He makes a sound as if he is taking his first breath. He pulls Nathan down to the mattress, unmindful of textbook and papers beneath. His weight is delicious and full. Their breathing changes together, and they press against each other, warmth exchanged for warmth, as Roy sighs into Nathan's hair.

In the quiet wake of the moment, the sounds of the house clarify and isolate themselves. Mom washes dishes in the subterranean kitchen. Dad dozes through the weekly Hawaiian detective series in the living room. Out in the world the wind is blowing leaf against leaf, an insistent whispering with a scent of storm. "Does this make you feel funny?" Roy asks.

"No."

"It makes me feel funny."

"Well, maybe it makes me feel a little funny too. But I don't care."

"I don't care either. I just wonder why." He lies on the bed watching the ceiling. "Do you like me?"

"Yes." Nathan can hardly lift his eyes from the soft chenille.

"Do you like me a lot?" There is something frightened in the question.

Roy's body has become rigid. It is as he is denying the words as they emerge.

Nathan speaks suddenly, with violence, against Roy's shoulder. "I like you a whole lot. I really do. And I want you to like me the same way."

"I do," he says. Saying so much has apparently surprised him; he stands from the bed adjusting his pants, asking if Nathan wants to walk outside away from the houses. In the dark, Nathan spares no breath for an answer but falls in beside him down the corridor, descending the back stairway to the kitchen, pausing while the shadow of Mom retreats into the dining room, the unknowable rooms beyond.

At the back door Roy's hand hovers over Nathan's. Fresh air from the night spills over Nathan. Roy steps into the inky quiet and Nathan orbits him.

Mom's dim voice calls out, "Where are you going, Nathan? Nathan?"

"Outside." By then the night surrounds him.

Roy runs and Nathan follows, into the waist-high weeds behind the barn, into the flood of moonlight that pools within the pokeweed and broomstraw. Roy is laughing from deep inside his chest, and he runs ahead into the white, glowing world. Nathan follows at his slower pace. The tinned houses dwindle behind, and the shadow pines rise up toward the stars. Nearing the pond, they descend the slight embankment leading to the watery lip. Roy pauses at the edge, touching his sneaker to the waterline. He checks to make sure Nathan is following, then kneels with a sycamore branch, drawing a line in the pale muddy pond bottom. The moonlight records the motion perfectly, they can see everything. Clouds of mud rise in the water from the tip of the stick.

"I like this place at night."

Nathan stops near Roy's elbow. "It's quiet."

"There's a cemetery over yonder." Roy points with the stick. To a thickening of shadow.

He shivers. "A real one?"

"Yeah. With great big tombstones. There's a lot of them, with angels and statues. They look pretty spooky at night."

"Can we go there?"

"You sure you want to? Your Mom might get mad if we stay out too long."

"I want to."

Willows, arrow arum and cattails grow to the edge of the pond, and royal fern and honeysuckle overhang the glimmering water. Branches crack underfoot, pine needles protesting. Roy's passage is quieter than Nathan's, his feet somehow lighter. He lifts aside limber branches with an easy hand, holding them over Nathan's head. The path through the darkening trees is washed with light, and the substance of Roy moves through it dense and shadowed. Nathan hurries behind Roy, drawing audible breath after audible breath. The pond spreads a hush, the trees lift their branches, the stars and moon burn. Between is a blackness the eye fails to fathom.

The cemetery gate and iron fence form out of nothing, within a circle of trees at the top of a rise of land. Roy opens the iron gate and shows Nathan the rust stains on his palms. The two are silent as they move into the enclosure, overgrown with weeds. Tombstones, some topples, and the leavings of wreaths impede their passage. The ground gives off a clotted, dank smell. Roy is breathless. He passes his hand along eroded marble in which letters are carved. Nathan studies the words but fails to read them, so Roy leans close and whispers, "This one says, Sarah Jane Kennicutt, Her Father's Favorite Daughter. The Kennicutts used to own all this land, that's what people say. There were two Kennicutt plantations, one right around here that burned down, and another one off in the woods."

"Then why is it Poke's Road?"

Roy shrugs. "Poke's Road goes for a long ways. It must have been some Pokes on it, once upon a time." He is leaning against Nathan. "I'll take you to the end of that road one of these days. Way off in the woods where it's overgrown and nobody can use it."

Nathan nods, but is rendered speechless by touch. Roy grips Nathan's arm and leads him to another grave over which looms a guardian obelisk. The shadow of the granite shaft passes across Roy's face, and his expression is inscrutable. Something in Roy's stance lays a field of silence around them both.

Now both Roy's hands touch both Nathan's arms. He watches Nathan with a new quiet. It is hard for Nathan to be conscious of anything but the touch of those hands on his arms, the texture of tough skin and strong fingers. Nathan makes one sound, throaty and startled, like an animal giving a single warning. Roy exerts the slightest pressure.

His body is full of curves beneath the clothes. Nathan leans against him, as Roy slightly smiles. He kneels in the grass and brings Nathan down with him. The two are trembling and huddle together in the dark of the grave. The sweetness of the moment lingers. The salty smell of Roy's body rises out of the shirt that he unbuttons and slides over his shoulders. Moonlight glitters on the slight sweat of his chest. A calm deliberateness engulfs him. Nathan eases the worn jeans down Roy's thighs. Air pours against Nathan's skin as Roy strips away his cotton tee shirt. Nathan shivers with the chill.

Roy embraces the slighter boy and their warmth multiplies, their bodies shuddering and yet clinging each to the other, dressed only in white underwear in the shadow of the granite marker. The warmth makes chromosomes sing. Roy says, "Now we're buddies," with a tone of deep relief in his voice, and Nathan mouths the words soundlessly, watching the north star over the pond. He wonders what a buddy is and whether he is the only one Roy has. He is farther from home than he has ever been. Roy cradles him as if he will never let go. "Bats fly around here sometimes. You can hear them making that squeak noise."

"Do you hear any now?"

"No. I don't hear anything except you. But this is the place for bats, ain't it?" Roy surveys the surrounding tombstones as if they are his estate. He talks about them quietly as Nathan rests against him. "This thing is called an obelisk," he explains, and Nathan pretends to learn this as a new fact. "It's something people in the old times would put on a grave. This grave belongs to Frederick Kennicutt. He was kin to my great-granddaddy."

Nathan knows nothing about his own great-granddaddy. He simply watches Roy mouth the words. "Come on."

They uncoil and creep quietly through the tombstones in their undershorts. Along a rise of land they climb, to a place where the black pond is visible below. Up there is a statue of a plump baby wearing a robe, with stubby marble wings sprouting from his shoulders. Roy stands large and shapely beside the angel-baby, Roy more radiant than the stone in the same fall of thin moon-and-starlight. The sight of Roy encumbers Nathan so that even his gaze feels heavy; Roy is like an immense gravity and he is pulling Nathan toward him without any effort. Again Roy yields to Nathan's hands, gives way to touch. Nathan bends his knees and Roy rests on the ground beside him, above him. Nathan is breathing into the hollow of Roy's collarbone and Roy is laughing softly, reasonless.

Roy brushes his mouth against Nathan's and Nathan is surprised. Roy's taste is sweetish, life rising out of his throat, hot as if from deep furnaces. He holds Nathan's delicate skull in his hand. Nathan resists nothing. He lies down on their clothes in the weeds beneath the marble child, and Roy lies down along him. Roy is content to be still like that for a long time, sometimes watching Nathan and sometimes not, his open hand on Nathan's face. Their legs tangle in the weeds. Nathan can see the distended fabric of Roy's shorts, but he does not touch the place directly and Roy abstains from asking. They lie together, heat fields enfolded, kissing awkwardly now and then.

Roy says, "When we do this, you can't tell your parents."

"I won't."

"You can't tell your friends either. This is a secret."

"I know." Nathan feels some desperation he cannot name, like a slow sob.

"I'm not your boyfriend." Roy rests against Nathan as before, but they have each become still. "I have a girlfriend. And I don't need to do this if I don't want to."

Nathan receives the words all the way to the center of his bones. He watches Roy's face, trying to see through to his mind. It is like the silence on the bus, this moment. It is like Roy squaring his shoulders to the front of the bus. They lie together for a long time. Nathan watches the pond with Roy's shivering belly under his hand. Roy's large thigh stirs in the grass. The crickets drone. Finally Roy says in a tenderer tone, "We better get back."

Nathan stands and finds his clothes. Roy dresses close to him. The night has filled with sounds. From the shadows overhead come calls of night birds, and from the distant darkness echoes the yowling of a faraway cat, the singing of frogs, the murmuring of wind in branches. One shrill thin cry shivers along Nathan's spine, sounding almost human. A bobcat, Roy says.

In the back yard, in the shadow of the barn, Roy embraces Nathan, holding tight. "Bring my books in the morning. I'm going on home." No more parting than that. Roy's shadow vanishes.

In the kitchen, Nathan drinks sweet tea standing by the sink. The house is quiet except for the drone of the television.

Then Dad is in the room.

"Is that you, son?"

Nathan sets the glass carefully, quietly onto the sink. "Yes, sir."

The sweetish smell of his Old Spice clouds the kitchen. He has come from the living room. He is standing in shadow. "You been out for a walk."

"Yes sir."

"Where did you go?"

"Out to the pond. There's a graveyard out there."

"Who did you go with?"

"Roy. Next door." Very softly.

"He's a nice boy," Dad says.

He comes forward into the light and Nathan backs away. He considers Nathan from beside the refrigerator. Dad is wearing his white boxer shorts with the stained front, his white tee shirt with the torn sleeve and cigarette burns. The whiteness of his flesh, the softness, make Nathan look away.

"There's a Western on the t.v. You ought to come watch it with your Dad."

"No, sir."

Dad ponders this. He opens the door of the refrigerator. "All right. Then go to bed."

Nathan has been holding his breath. Released, he slips quietly upstairs, without turning on the light. He waits at the window until he is calm. He listens to make sure Dad goes back to the living room.

Across the yard Roy's window is dark. So it remains. ■

Jim Grimsley



Untitled by Teresa M. Sims

Shirlene Holmes

When I was my mother's father's cousin, Mae, I went with a white boy from Ridge Springs. We lived in Leesville, but I met him one day in town. He gave me the eye first. Then I gave it back to him. I think I was so interested because you wasn't supposed to be looking in the eyes of no whites then.

He had a car. It was light blue. He smoked Pall Mall and wasn't much older than me. He called me by my name, and I don't know how to this day he knew me, but he did. I couldn't figure out if I knew him, but he sure knew me.

I was in the store when he slipped me a note to meet him at his car. I was scared, but too interested not to go over to the car. So I go over and find out his name is Joey; at least that's what he tells me. He says he's from Leesville, and thinks I'm nice. I know not to believe him, but it sound good to hear.

I was wearing my light green cotton dress and my hair was tied back so tight it almost looked straight. He said I looked nice, but I knew better than to believe that either. He offered me a ride if I would walk a little ways down the road, out of sight, so no one would see.

I don't know what made me do it, but I did. When he pulled up, I jumped in that light blue car with my light green dress, and we sped off. I still feel the wind against my face. I was light headed, being in a car that close to white boy. I giggled kind of silly, but I couldn't help myself.

All I could do was see Daddy's face in my mind, how he was gonna be so sick about this. But no one was around. Just me and Joey. In that light blue car. I could tell he was a fast boy from the cigarettes and the dirt he had under his nails.

It took us a minute to make conversation. He wanted to know how old I was. "Seventeen," I lied. The car was on an unfamiliar path. It was still daylight, and I was making sure I was aware of everything. I didn't see no weapons. I didn't see no liquor. I didn't see nobody else in the backseat. The car was clean and he didn't look mean, but I still didn't trust him.

He told me a lot of stuff. Lies I guess, 'bout how he had seen me last week come to the store and how he liked me. He said he had a colored friend named Rubin and he liked us people. "Ya'll sure know how to have a good time." I didn't know what that meant. I got a little scared. Momma always said a boy only want one thing. I didn't really know what that one thing was, and was too scared to ask Momma. She don't appreciate being asked a lotta questions.

I wanted to get to know him. He was different. I took to him like a stray dog you might find on your way back from the store. He had curly brown hair; I wanted to touch it, see what it felt like. We wasn't allowed to be no where near white folks, let alone touch them. I wondered how they felt.

We wasn't allowed to be no where near white folks, let alone touch them. I wondered how they felt.

He caught me thinking. I must have not answered his last question. He was asking if I had any family. I told him about Momma and Daddy and my brother Butler who was 20 and would come after him if something happened to me. He laughed, but I couldn't tell if he meant something by it. I ain't got no brother, but he needed to know he had to answer to somebody if I ended up hurt or missing.

He finally stopped the car. I didn't see nothing familiar. This wasn't my side of town. He said we were safe, but I didn't believe that either. His eyes were so blue, just like pictures of white folks I'd seen in magazines at the library. I never stared in no white person's eyes before. He kinda smiled at me staring so hard at him. He was staring at me, too. Not in a nasty way, just curious, like me. I wonder did he notice that my edges was straight. I ran my nervous hand over the front of my head just to make sure every hair was still laying down.

He got to rambling about having a sister named Lonnie, how he loved her, but she wasn't as cute as me. He said he fixed cars and that his father had died two years ago and he was the man in the house now. I was impressed; I didn't know a man could look so young.

We were sitting there quiet, staring at each other, when he stuck his hand out to me to hold. I froze, as if I had forgot what to do when someone offered you their hand to shake. He must of thought I was a fool; I took a long time, but I finally got it done. I held his hand. It felt warm and thin. Kinda rough, too. White folks got a light feeling to them, not like Negroes who's hands is heavy and thick from scuffling and surving. I wonder if all white men's hands felt this way or this Joey something special that he have no weight in his hand. My skin was dark next to his, even though I'm brown complected; it made me feel too black. Daddy had told me to stay out of the sun. And we sat there holding hands for a long time.

Finally he smiled and I did too. He let me go, started the car and took me near the tracks. I got out quick, and said good bye, and walked lightheaded the rest of the way home. I still see Joey from time to time in town, but we don't say nothing. He wave his hand at me one time when he was getting into his light blue car. I wave my hand back. ■

Shirlene Holmes

Cousin Mildred was just about to pour her sardines over her grits and get her breakfast, when the phone rang. Elsa was way pass crazy on the other end of the line.

"Mildred, I done gone and found Mayretta dead on the couch in her living room and the police looking for Weem! You seen him?"

"No Elsa. Last time I seen Weem, he was switching over to the post office. We spoke hello and that's all. That was day before yestiddy. What the cops want with Weem?"

"They think he done killed his Momma."

"He wouldn't do that. I bet they can't prove it!"

"They sure gonna try 'fore this day is over."

"They'll never do it. I'll call you later."

Cousin Mildred hung up the phone. Seem like her breakfast couldn't go down good no more after the news. Mayretta was Mildred's first cousin on her daddy's side and she didn't even want to think about attending another funeral this soon. Her baby brother Bill just passed last month.

Everybody in Cotsville knew about Weem and how he had a limp wrist and wore them women's clothes and a face full of make up nearly everyday. Thing is, he look pretty with it. He had them features like a china doll. Weem was Mayretta one and only child and she suffered to have him.

You couldn't help but feel sorry for Mayretta. That sugar diabetes had been getting her for years. She battled with them insulin needles since she was a girl. Doctors told her she better never have no children; between the high blood pressure, her bad heart and the sugar, she wouldn't live through it. But Mayretta wanted a baby so bad. When her mother, Mae Frances, was living, she did all she could to talk Mayretta out of getting in the family way. But when Jimmie Lee Bushman came to town, there was nothing she could do. He was a sharp dressing man come to town just to work a while at the water plant. He'd come to Cotsville every evening to read to Mayretta, 'cause she had long gone legally blind in her eyes. One of them nights he put his book down and lifted Mayretta's dress tail up and here come Weem nine months later.

Jimmie Lee Bushman left town and never looked back. Mayretta couldn't see why, so she sat on that couch the rest of her days waiting for him. Miss Mae Frances would have to listen to her daughter's chatter about Jimmie Lee and answer everyday if the baby looked him. Of course the child look just like Mayretta, who fussed and pampered over Weem till he wasn't no good to nobody, just fresh mouthed, hard headed and off in the head if you ask Miss Mae Frances. One thing for sure was that Weem was a pretty chile. You had to look hard to tell if he was girl or boy. His features was so smooth and chiseled, look just like a statue. Mayretta never did cut his hair, so he just spent his days flipping from boy to girl when he pleased. By the time he was a teenager, he flipped female and stayed there. Mayretta loved him just the same. His grandmother kept her distance.

'Fore she died of that stroke, Miss Mae Frances kept trying to tell Mayretta that something was dead wrong with Weem. She had caught him in the backyard smoking Virginia Slims cigarettes and wearing red lip paint. She even caught him in his bedroom slicing his arms and legs up with razor blades, blood just-a-dripping over the sheets and thangs. Weem made Miss Mae Frances so nervous, especially when he got to stealing from her and Mayretta and they only had two SSI checks between them once a month to pay for everythang.

Most folks in Cotsville laughed and snickered at Weem for a long time 'cause he had them habits of putting on cherry red heels, women's clothes and switching up the road. George, who usually be drunk on vodka first thing in the morning, would still whistle and say, "Hey, sweet thang!" every time them cherry pumps went by. Weem would just roll his eyes, glad he don't spend no mornings with George for so little money.

The teasing in Cotsville stopped after that night in the tavern when Tootie's beer got the best of him and he started jugging with Weem. When he couldn't get what he wanted, Tootie hauled off and slapped Weem right in the middle of the dance floor. Latimore was crooning, "LET'S STRAIGHTEN IT OUT. . . oh baby let's straighten it out. . ." when Weem took out his blade and put a slash 'cross Tootie's face that he's wearing to this day.

So after that nobody mess with Weem. Not even when he be walking up the dirt road in his cherry red pumps with tears streaking his face. Mother Martha, when he happen to go by her house would just shudder and "rebuke that demon!" Cleveretta called Teresa and remarked how Weem "wouldn't have to cry so much if he took the heels off." "That's right. Chile, you know them high heel pumps is hell. Have your dawgs barkin'," Teresa added.

Nobody knowed it, but Weem always cried. He woke up that way. He went to bed that way. The only time his eyes were dry was when he was eating Missionary Porter's sweet potato pie over at Mary and Lou's. They were his only friends in Cotsville. Lou would listen to his problems and Mary would rock him in her arms. That first time he tried to kill himself, Mary and Lou was the only ones to come up to the mental hospital in Scarsboro and visit and pray over him.

One time, after Weem had cut his legs up real bad, he confided in Lou how he was just getting some of the pain out. His Momma had to have her other foot cut off and he was feeling sad about it. He was hysterical that day and talked about getting the hell out of Cotsville as soon as some fresh meat came to town. Weem was always waiting for a shining prince to roll his car into Cotsville and take him away. It nearly happen once, back 2 years ago now. But when it didn't work out, Weem messed up and took 25 of his Momma's Darvon pills and damn near died on Mary and Lou's bathroom floor.

Miss May Frances, who been dead about 5 years or more now, had done told Mayretta that Weem need to be put away. But Mayretta couldn't see it. All she know is that Weem was a pretty chile and that Jimmie Lee would straighten it all out when he came back.

**The only time his eyes were dry was when
he was eating Missionary Porter's
sweet potato pie over at Mary and Lou's.**

The night before Elsa found Mayretta dead, Weem come in the room where she was laying on the couch. She hadn't slept in her bed in God knows how long. She wasn't feeling herself, jumpy from her son's misery and loudness. He played his Aretha Franklin music and sang at the top of his lungs. **YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE A NATURAL WOMAN!!!!!! WOMAN!!!!** She begged him to turn it down til her throat got raw. Even though she couldn't see it, Weem had done gone got him a bottle and a fresh pack of razors. He wasn't but 22 and so pretty.

He stood in the mirror, his red negligee matching his heels. He didn't have nobody to love and that night it hurt worst than before. Not even his mother's raw shouts from the couch stopped him from putting the cutting razor to his flesh. Aretha was building a bridge over troubled water, when Weem wiped up the blood, and went to talk to his mother.

"Momma, got any money?"
"I got a coupla dollars, but I need it for my insulin."
"I git it back to you."
"When, Weem?"
"I have it tomorrow."
"What you need money for?"
"I wanna go out."
She reached into her fleshy bosom and handed her son the folded dollars.
"I hate for you to go to the tavern; they just drinking and fighting there."
Why don't you read to me. I feel so bad right now."
Weem crossed over to where the Bible was, his cherry red pumps clicking against the floor. His negligee, red satin and lace. Aretha was steady crooning, **AIN'T NO WAY** in the next room.

"What you want me to read, Momma?"
"Read me some Revelations. All the way in the back."
Weem found it easy. Revelation 22. He crossed his legs, the fresh cuts began to sting. He read softly: "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits . . ."

"Skip on down," Mayretta urged weakly.
"And there shall be no more curse . . ."
"Drop on down and read."

"And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun for the Lord giveth them light."
"Go down and read verse 17."
"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hearest say, Come. And let him that is a thirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely . . ."
"I can't read no more, Momma." Weem exclaimed, quickly shutting the book, a tear caught in the corner of his eye.
"I hear the Spirit and the bride, Weem."
"They saying, 'Come,' Momma?"
"I hear it so strong."
"Don't leave me, Momma. You all I got."
"Momma gotta go. I'll be able to see over there."

After that Mayretta got quiet and wouldn't answer even when Weem balled up like a baby and kept calling her and trying to tell her he was sorry. He wasn't gonna go in her pocketbook no more and take her money or sneak her Avon per-fumes. The house was dead silent. Aretha wasn't singing in the other room and only Weem was breathing.

He picked up the Bible and threw it against the wall. The picture of white Jesus on the cross shook off its hook and hit the floor. Weem paced, scuffing wood with his heels. He needed a cigarette, but he had promised Mayretta and his grandma that he wouldn't smoke in the house ever again. So he just cried, his whole slim body shaking like a leaf on a tree.

It was about 9:00 then so he went in the kitchen and fixed a plate like he usually did. "You want some of these chicken wings, Momma?" he said louder than normal. He broke a glass when she didn't answer.

After a long time, he wiped his greasy mouth and hands on a dish rag, and Weem put on his red dress and some fresh make up and went out the door. He was headed to Mary and Lou's just across the way nearby where the train run.

Mayretta lay there dead on the couch till Elsa come over to visit the next day and found her peaceful and still. Elsa prayed for Mayretta's soul and called the police.

Cousin Mildred sat with her head in her hands. It was early evening now. The scent of the sardines was still stinking up the whole kitchen. You know ain't nothing worse than some cold grits, so Mildred walked out on the porch and lit her a Pall Mall. She was half way through her cigarette when she saw Flossie coming towards her porch in her car.

"Mildred, they done found Weem."
"Where at?"
"Dead on the railroad track. Said the 11:59 hit him."
"He dead as a macrel, ain't he?"
"Just gone, girl. I don't think he killed Mayretta."
"Me neither. That sugar took her."
"Weem was sure pretty."
"That boy ain't never been right, but he wasn't no killer."
"That's the truth."

Flossie pulled off as Mildred flung the butt of her cigarette over her porch and across her front lawn.

They had a double funeral. Everybody in Cotsville come just to see what they was gonna bury Weem in. They put him in a dark blue suit with a cherry red tie, and he still sure was pretty.



Untitled by Teresa M. Sims

Shirlene Holmes

RADIO VENEZUELA

Franklin Abbott

Note: When I was a boy I spent many hours alone in my room with the door shut listening to my radio. Late at night transmissions from the local stations became fuzzy and through the static I could pick up programs from as far away as Cuba and Chicago. It is in this way I would offer you my story of Venezuela and my new-found family there. It is a story of gay life in South America, of my journey there, of being lost and found in a way peculiar to those who leave behind their culture to wander in another.

This is the voice of Radio Venezuela
Coming to you live not from Caracas
But from the humid valley of Aracay
From the garden city of Maracay
Where the Latin Stalin Gomez lies
Reduced to dust in his fancy morish mausoleum
Where the air is thick with the perfume of flowers, traffic fumes, mosquito
smoke and fetid garbage
Where the market teems in the heat and cool winds come down from the
mountains at night
And Tacaregua, goddess of the lake, is encased in glass in Gomez' jail
While Miss Venezuela comes to you live between long commercials
She wears silver shoes
Her hair is as black as the caves of Guaracho
This is the voice of Radio Venezuela
Tune in, listen now, don't go away . . .

Yesterday was the hardest day. I was recovering from travel still — the travel here, to Coro and back and to Caracas where I overindulged in cervesas and cigarettes at El Meson de la Tortilla, where I sat on the hard little stools and drank with Armando and Jesus Fortuna. The waiter, dressed in black with a long red sash and an open shirt with red buttons beside its black frill, was most attentive, our eyes meeting as eyes often do and a charge building over the hours. I pressed 100 Bolivars into his hand as I said, "Gracias, Señor" and carried the electricity with me through dinner in an outdoor cafe in the Sabana Grande, through the Metro to catch the bus and in the dark rattle of the bus, climbing up through fog and down through heat into the valley of Aragua, back to Maracay where Max was waiting at the terminal. I left my nausea on the bus with its rattles and fumes and grew calm and sleepy as we drove the circuitous route back to Las Delicias.

That morning as we rode to Caracas Armando slept and I fixed my eyes on the green fields of sugar cane that fill the valley and then on the fog in the hills as we climbed to Caracas. The bucares tres are in full bloom, their orange blossoms numinous in the gray fog of the hillsides. That same gray made a sky above Caracas that was a blessing as the sun here can be unforgiving. We went to a restaurant Armando knew in the Spanish sector and had a fine meal finished with a cake made with coconut milk called Bien Me Sabe, or Taste Me Good. The national Museum was closed so we made our way by taxi to the Museo de Arte Colonial in the hills above Caracas. Here, tile floored and roofed, gardens glowing with roses and orchids, is the house of the Marques del Toro, Simon Bolivar's uncle. The heavy Spanish furnishings collected from the period are offset by religious paintings and statuary also of the period. Two interesting objects noted and remembered: a crucifix whose outstanding feature is the silver nails that hold the carved Christ to his little wooden cross and an alarm clock that used a magnifying glass, gunpowder and a small cannon to waken sleeping colonials from their siestas.

Jesus Fortuna, a friend of Armando's, works nearby as an accountant. We finished our tour and found him at his desk almost finished with another list of numbers. We went together to the Metro and to the Sabana Grande, a shopping and entertainment district popular with young people, Bohemians, beggars and gays, to El Meson de la Tortilla to drink our many beers.

This morning I woke up and the sky was blue again, the haze of several days consumed by the night. I pull back curtains and the sun comes strong into my room from over the short, steep coastal mountains, brown now in the dry season. Light and shadow still mix as the sun climbs over the ridge. One hundred feet or so below in an indentation in the mountains the top of a single tree is lit, its burnt umber foliage glowing softly. Above in the blue sky vultures circle something dead or dying. I place my fatigue beside it, my resistive, unrelaxed somewhat fearful cloak that yesterday hung heavy, a nuisance.

A call from Atlanta, last night and the primitive reassurance that my life at home is still in tact was good medicine. So was the long sleep that Armando and Max tried to keep me from with their half-teasing admonitions about young men who died from indigestion because they slept too soon after a meal. My psoas muscles inside

my thighs seem better too — I feared I'd burned them out in my jubilant climbing on the great Dunes of Coro. Armando, Jose and I drove the long road from Maracay to Coro stopping in Porto Cabello for Empanadas de Cazon, fried pies full of shredded young shark meat. Sensing my hesitation to eat these, Armando assured me that the sharks were small ones, much too small to have eaten a person, and described the curing process where the meat is soaked in lemon water to remove the taste of urine.

They were good and brought me no harm, though I wasn't afraid of eating a person second hand but of something so fierce it can only be seen under a microscope. The sardonic travel doctor in Atlanta said she wouldn't leave home without a gamma globulin shot. I declined offering only one of my arms for a yellow fever vaccination that she assured me would only be fully effective after I returned home.

Before I left I spoke by phone with Armando who warned me about the yellow fever when I had asked him about the reports of Dengue fever that several friends had seen in the newspaper and called to my attention. He described the outbreak in Maracay and how many children had died from it. He talked about the spraying and the government campaign to educate people to eliminate places where mosquitoes breed. I've only seen two mosquitoes since I've been here. They don't call up in me the same primal fears as do the large and small, dark and multicolored spiders that live in the house. I killed a black fuzzy one that seemed to want to share my bed. Since then I just notice and following the lead of my hosts, do nothing about them. In my mind I tell myself that they eat the mosquitoes.

Old Coro is where the Spanish came first to South America. The colonial sector still holds the character of another time. Streets cobblestoned and houses in pastel, shuttered windows to the street sometimes open to dark, small rooms or the gizzened faces of dark, small women haloed in white hair over piercing black eyes. The dunes near town rise out of the desert over a hundred feet up and Armando and Jose and I romped and ran among them with childlike abandon. There the wind and sand are like lovers ever changing positions and high on the shifting sands my shirt open, arms wide against the wind I am touched with the spirit of place as I sometimes can be when I am constellated in a certain way with nature. The words of my prayer mixed with the rush of the wind over sand and I could feel the layers of my being penetrated through aura into flesh, flesh into bone, bone into particles I will one day be reduced to as I am reduced in making love — losing myself in my lover's losing himself in my losing myself — for a moment there high on the Dunes of Coro I knew not who was the wind and who was me.

The high cloud-covered jungle in the mountains of Rancho Grande National Park are as different a place from the Dunes of Coro as I can hold in my imagination. The road from Maracay to Cata Beach snakes up and around first through the brown hills colored with only an occasional Flor Amarillo or Palo Santo now in full bloom yellow and pale red. Higher up the roadside turns green lush with ferns and higher still under the forest canopy are palms, bananas and riqui-riqui whose red and yellow flowers hang low on long slender green stems. Above is birdsong and the distant chagger of monkeys high in the orchid, moss and bromeliad laden boughs. We stop in this fresh, pristine place so I can wander with my camera and I do aim and shoot though I will never capture this Eden in Ektachrome, nor is it possible to record in any way the cool, sweet energy that seeps under the senses as an invitation to ecoreverence. Back down through the brown, through the village of Ocumare we drive through a desert sporting human-size cacti, around the bends and over the mountain to the cool blue and aquamarine waters of the Caribbean that meet the

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palm-lined beaches that make the crescent of Cata Bay. The beaches are uncrowded — a few romantically-inclined couples cuddling in the sand, muscular lifeguards trying to outdo each other's backward flips, some black boys playing a drum, a few lobster-colored Germans, the sea and us. I slip into the dream I dream whenever I am at the ocean that time has never been able to rob me of because time can be no part of it; the chattering monkeys of my mind are lulled into rest in the constant ebb and flow of wind and wave. Armando and I bathe in the crystal-clear waters, take a long stroll and sit in front of the only restaurant, drink two beers apiece and gaze at the waves breaking. Armando says he is sleepy and wishes for a hammock, instead we must find out what time it is, the mountain roads will be fogged over and are treacherous at night. Like clockwork two German tourists appear both wearing watches. It is later than we thought so we must start back. We drive first to Ocumare where we find a small outdoor restaurant and sit to take a meal of jurel

fish, arroz con je dulce and fried platanos. Our bread is hallaquitas, corn meal, onions and peppers wrapped in corn husks, steamed and delicious. After a demitasse cup of cafe maroon, coffee that is not too light and not too strong, we climb the mountains, but not in time to escape the clouds that have already descended. The jungle enshrouded in clouds can be a scary movie or a primeval wonder, vine and tendril silhouetted in fog, the green world gone, replaced by the spectral where shapes shift and concrete reality dissolves in the mist. This wonder fades on the other side of the mountain and we can see from high above the city of Maracay and to the west Valencia Lake and her islands where archaeologists have found ceremonial sites of pre-Columbian times.

The archaeological museum in Maracay is in the old jail built in the 30's by the dictator Gomez. Armando says the people working there now fear the ghosts that still lurk in Gomez' torture chambers. Gomez lived most of the time in Maracay and turned the city into a garden with wide promenades and the largest central square of any city in Venezuela. He preferred Maracay to the capital Caracas because of its strategic possibilities. Caracas is in a basin surrounded by mountains. Maracay is on a plain the Aragua Valley and easily defended. Underneath Maracay are tunnels the dictator built connecting his houses, the jail, the cathedral and who knows what else, tunnels wide enough and high enough for men on horses to ride through. Gomez is long dead and in disgrace for his meanness. His torture house now holds the bones and pottery shards of a people long assimilated with the Spaniards and their African slaves whose rites are now lost mysteries. We do know the name of their chief deity. She is Tacaregua, goddess of growing things and goddess of the lake. Her head is rectangular, eyes in perpetual narrow gaze, her hands change positions and her sex is more or less noticeable on the half dozen or so clay figurines that stand on glass shelves in the glass case in the old jail. Some other smaller figures of men and animals but none compare in face or force to Tacaregua, goddess of the lake and everything that grows around it.

In this fertile place it is an assumption that things will grow. There are fruit trees in every garden, flowers bloom profusely year round, the goddess is ever at work. She is worshipped now as Maria Lonza and her cult has included the dictator of the 50's and 60's, Perez Jimenez, who set up her statue on a thoroughfare that runs through Caracas. There in this Catholic country rides the pagan goddess, Maria Lonza, naked on horseback holding high in her hands the bare bone collar of a man's pelvis.

Her shrine is on a fountain near Barquisimento — I've gotten close but no one will take me there. My Venezuelan friends are none too eager to visit a place where the faithful, drunk on rum, fall into ecstatic trances. I will persist in my requests for an invitation from Maria Lonza. I had to visit the museum four times before the right woman with the right key could open the cabinet where the replicas of Tacaregua's statue are kept so I could make a purchase. The night after I did and slept in the same room with Her, I dreamed this dream. A sly young woman with an infant comes to my home and demands to spend the night. I say no but she implores and I relent. Then she asks me for money. I say I have money but only enough for my expenses and my debts. She insists I can give her thirty dollars. I say no and shut the door. In the morning she is gone, but she has left the baby. I cradle the child knowing he is mine to keep and care for.

The women of Venezuela are still outside of my personal experience except for Armando's mother, grandmother and his friend Immaculata. She was recovering from surgery in Caracas so I did not go to Turnero this time to visit he in her house of international tchotchkas. She is a remarkable woman born with no legs and wheelchair-bound, she has traveled the world and presides over her own business, a pharmacy. I met only one lesbian, atypical in her short hair and blue jean jacket decorated with diaper pins. At the El Meson de la Tortilla she handed me a note on my way to the bathroom from a young man whose romantic fantasies I had evidently excited. She was vivacious, full of laughter and Armando said she had sangre liviana, light blood, as opposed to sangre pesada, heavy blood, that makes you mean and miserable. The other lesbians there were like the women I've seen on the street and on TV, flamboyant in their dress and hairstyle always with amazing earrings. My first night in Maracay I watched the interminable annual Miss Venezuela contest on TV. Twenty-three women from the states and territories of Venezuela walk up and down rampways in elaborate costumes and stiletto heels. They transform between sets of an elaborate floor show into fashion models and bathing beauties. Their silver-tasseled identical bathing suits all revealed the cheeks of their buttocks. After several princesses were selected and crowned, Miss Estado Bolivar was chosen, a slender dignified woman from the state where Angel Falls cascade off a mesa-topped mountain into a river that is part of the headwaters of the mighty Orinoco. Upon her head was placed a huge sparkling diadem any queen would envy. She did not have to walk the runway one more time, but sat immediately in a jewel-encrusted throne, her face washed white in photographer's flash. I contrast her highness to the old woman I met on the street in Coro on her way home from mass,

drinking a bottle of beer, her head covered in a kerchief, one black raven's eye the other smoked white with a cataract, or the even older, almost ancient tiny crone I saw sitting on the curb of a street in Caracas, her dress out of another century and dangling from her brown ears black plastic batman earrings.

The men of Venezuela watch bull fights, play soccer, drive fast, gamble, ramble and drink. That's the image of macho and like macho in other places the reality never quite fits the fantasy. Gay men are not excused from the macho ethic, though they soften it and behind closed doors ridicule the macho man, all the while in lust for him. They teasingly call each other locas. In Spanish the word Loco means a crazy man. Loca is the feminine of loco. A loca is a crazy woman, or in the slang of the day, a gay man. My hosts in Venezuela are a gay couple, Armando and Max. Both 35 and together for over six years they live in a suburb of Maracay, Las Delicias, not far from the coastal mountains. The Venezuelan economy went bust last year and their home boutique of women's clothes went bust with it as new clothing has become a luxury for working people in Venezuela. Now Max sells eggs, dirty ones that can't be cleaned for market, at a discount to happy customers and Armando is working to open a guest house and travel service for which I have been both guinea pig and advisor on the strange ways of gringos. Armando and Max have three sons, Raoul, Jose and Eduardo, younger gay men who call them Dad and Mother and who spend most of their evenings in Las Delicias away from their original families with whom they still live. Among these five is one of the strongest, sweetest senses of family I have ever encountered. Five highly distinct personalities schmoozing, discussing, fighting and making up, sharing intimately the details of their respective lives and finding between them a sense of community in a harshly homophobic culture. I am their Uncle/Aunt from Atlanta. This is my second visit and we are all closer as a consequence. Only Armando speaks English, the others know a few words on par with my few words of Spanish. I'd brought with me this time a fancy expensive pocket computer that translates 1400 words back and forth into English, Spanish, German, French and Italian. I never used it. We didn't always understand each other in detail and our Spanglish at times was comical, but laughter is much loved in Venezuela and making a fool of yourself is always preferred to being a serious bore. Laughter was part of our common language, as were touch, facial expression and eye contact. By the end of my stay this worked 90% of the time with Armando translating only when asked.

continued on page 26



Untitled by Teresa M. Sims

My last two nights in Venezuela were different kinds of celebrations. On Saturday night Armando and I went with his friend Gustavo, and Gustavo's new boyfriend Xavier, to the nearby city of Valencia, to the only gay discotheque in a hundred mile radius. The Playback Discotheque is very basic, very loud and full of Venezuelan lesbians and gay men dancing merengue and the new craze imported from Brazil, lambada. I watched as these same-sex couples moved fast and smooth and close across the floor. Max, who loves only old music and dances, had tried days previous to teach me a posadoble with Armando shouting in the background, "It's like a

The men of Venezuela watch bull fights, play soccer, drive fast, gamble, ramble and drink. That's the image of macho and like macho in other places the reality never quite fits the fantasy.

march, one, two, one, two." Only you move your hips up and down rather than feet. I couldn't quite master it. Back at the Playback the music shifts to standard disco which I can handle and I dance a long set with my friends. Then it's back to lambada and I am on the sidelines watching until Gustavo's new boyfriend Xavier takes his turn educating the gringo. Lambada is a fast, tight waltz alternated with bebop and the rhythmical moving of the stomach. This requires using the lambada muscles that most gringos do not even know they have. Xavier proved a good teacher and though my lambada is basic, it is lambada and I can do it too.

The next night's celebration was much more intimate. It was my last night and it was just the family. Max prepared a parilla or barbecue of beef, sausage and yucca root and we ate out on the patio. After dinner we sat and talked and watched the stars twinkle in and out of passing clouds. We ate carnival cake that Eduardo baked. It was red, green and blue and flavored with guarabana, a strange fruit that tastes like a cross between a guava and a banana. We opened the bottle of champagne I bought at duty free and toasted each other on several accounts: health, wealth, love, safe journeys and swift returns. After our toasting the boys have a gift for me, a strange fuzzy yellow stuffed creature. Eduardo presents the creature in the form of a game he learned as a kid in school. Each person holds the creature, says what he would like to do to it, does it to it and passes it on. Eduardo pulls creature's ears, Max slaps his butt, Jose kisses his cheek, I his nose, and Raoul his rear end and Armando his head. Then Eduardo says we must proceed from his fight and do to each other what we just did to creature. This is, of course, the source of much teasing and laughter.

I say goodbye to Jose and Raoul that night and to Eduardo, who stayed over, the next morning. Armando and Max drove me to the airport in Caracas and we said goodbye there. I did not cry as I had the last time I left Venezuela. It was a happy-come back soon-I will farewell. It was not until I cleared security and saw the front page of El Nacional, a Caracas newspaper, with a free Nelson Mandela on front did I start to cry and continue to leak tears all the way from Caracas to Miami. I was weeping for a suffering that is ending in me as I learn a language of love I can speak without moving my tongue.

This is the voice of Radio Venezuela
I am calling you through the night
To end your dances that do not matter
And dance a softer, faster dance
That I, the wind on the Dunes of Coro, will leave no part of you uncarressed
That I, Tacaregua, goddess of the lake, will grow stronger and deeper in my
nurture and make new milk, sweet water, ripe fruit
That I, Maria Lonza, will hold high the dictator's pelvis until everywhere
women and men know my justice and are free
That I, Miss Venezuela, am a loca dressed in bucare and amarillo flowers
My hair black as the caves of Guaracho
My head held high I do not walk afraid

This is Radio Venezuela calling
Do you hear me
Can you understand
Turn loose of everything
That is not freedom
Dance a softer dance, a faster dance
Dance for your life, for my life
For our life together

This is the voice of Radio Venezuela
Tune in, listen now
Don't go away . . . ■

franklin Abbott



Untitled by Jim Polak



THE PROBLEM

Chapter 1 of unpublished novel, *The Problem*

Dallas Denny

Doc Symmons told me I should write everything down. “Don’t worry about the grammar, Laura Ann,” he said. “Don’t worry about the spelling. Don’t go worrying about getting everything in the right order. Don’t try for the Pulitzer. Just make sure you get everything on paper. You don’t have to show it to me or anyone else. But it would be a great tragedy if the world were to miss out on your story.”

He was kidding, I think. About the tragedy, I mean. With Doc Symmons, it’s sometimes hard to tell.

Doc is small-town crazy, which is more acceptable than big-city crazy, so he’s let to run around loose, and shops at K-Mart and everything — although maybe he should be the one on the couch and I should be pretending to listen to his woes, instead of him pretending to listen to mine. But he’s the one with the office in the mall and that cold-fish red-headed receptionist that he shares with the rest of the doctors in the suite, and I’m the one who has to work her skinny butt off to make ends meet. Even though I’m normal and Doc is as looney as the Cocoa Puff bird.

Not that Doc isn’t good at what he does. No, even though he’s what Bobby Joe calls a talkin’ doctor (as opposed to a doin’ doctor), he’s worth his fee, for he’s helping me come to a decision about my “problem.” Besides, I’ve yet to pay him eighty-five dollars. By the time that hotsy-totsy redhead finishes punching forty-two numbers into the hiccupping Casio calculator on her desk, I pay only twelve dollars and fifty cents. I don’t know where the other seventy-two fifty comes from. Out of the redhead’s pocketbook, I would guess, from the expression on her face.

I’ll bet she isn’t red-headed you-know-where.

I’m in the bathtub. Now, that may seem like a strange place to start a manuscript, but according to Doc, the tub is the only place where I come face-to-face (in a manner of speaking) with my “problem.” It seems as good a place to begin as any.

You’ll notice that I put quotations marks around the word “problem.” I’ve noticed that writers do that, when they use a word that doesn’t really fit what they’re trying to say. I used quotation marks because I’m still not sure I do have a problem. Everyone else thinks so, of course, so indeed I may have a problem, with no quote marks.

My problem stares at me with its Cyclopean eye. That’s the way I’ll start off when I revise this. This draft will never do, for I’m putting things down as I think of them; I’ll need to go back through and decide what will stay and what will go. Besides, the notebook is damp from the steam in the bathroom. It makes the paper wrinkle.

My Problem stares at me with its Cyclopean eye. It is a problem (or a “problem” of anatomy, but one that is really irrelevant to all but me and those with whom I choose to share it. Yet, it’s surprising how everyone is so preoccupied with (Doc would say “fixated on”) my Problem. People who have never seen it and will never, ever see it seem to think it’s the most significant thing about me.

Doc has never laid eyes on it. Like the others, he takes it as a matter of faith that it exists as part of my body. Most of the people who are worried about it have never beheld it. In fact, in my entire life, fewer than a dozen people have seen it.

No, that’s not true, for I was forgetting about that wretched episode last summer at job camp, when everyone up to and including the lieutenant governor had to come take a gander at it, once they realized that I had it. But aside from that, only the doctor who delivered me (and I guess his nurse) and my ma and my pa and my three older sisters. Maybe a baby sitter or two. And of course, Mary June Cunningham.

And then there’s Johnny Ray, with whom I played doctor when I was five and he was six — at his insistence, I might add. Now, one might think I would have been inclined to play doctor with a little girl, but there was no little girl handy, and besides, I had seen my mother’s and I seen my sisters’, and I had changed my sister Lucinda’s baby girl’s diapers. No, I had seen little girls. What I hadn’t seen was a little boy’s, and when I saw Johnny Ray’s and realized that his was the same as mine, I knew that something was bad wrong with my body. It made me want to throw up. It didn’t help matters when Johnny Ray’s pa caught us red-handed, so-to-speak, for he took us to my ma and pa and Johnny Ray and me both got called perverts and threatened with hellfire and eternal damnation for our mortal souls. It seemed like a big fuss for such a couple of little things.

That episode didn’t affect Johnny’s life very much — it didn’t seem to, anyway — but it sure as hell put a brand on me. If Pa hadn’t much use for me before, he had even less after Albert Ray, standing in our front yard in a sleeveless t-shirt which exposed the tattoos he had got in Singapore when he was in the Navy, worked up a good sweat swearing about our perfidious behavior, for which, of course, I was blamed. Now, Johnny Ray’s Daddy had no room to talk, for I found out years later that tattoos notwithstanding, he was a closet case himself. Neither did Pa, who was not exactly famous for keeping his pecker in his pants, either. But with them against me, and with Johnny insisting that I had made him do it, and with my very demeanor shouting deviancy at them, it was no wonder that I was the one who was blamed, who was damned forever after in the eyes of my father, that man of men.

My problem rarely shows itself these days, keeping itself tucked firmly out of harm’s way, except for those rare occasions when biology asserts itself, and it stirs about and threatens to rise to the attack.

I’d better rein in here and circle my horses. Pardon the cowboy talk. It comes from reading too many westerns, which I find laying around the house after Pa gets through with them. Whenever I pick one up and read it, I tend to get ram-bunctious, and if I don’t watch myself, I talk Louis L’Amour or Zane Grey for a few days. I walk around on the balls of my feet, looking at people out of the corners of my eyes and squinting into the sun, like Clint Eastwood in a spaghetti western. And I just finished reading a Max Brand paperback. Anyway — in common parlance, I’m putting the cart before the horse. First things first.

My name is Laura Ann Sykes. It is also Leroy Amos Sykes. I was born with the second; I go by the first. I have the looks and demeanor and disposition of a Laura, and I have the history and sex organs of a Leroy. I am unfortunately still legally a Leroy. I’ve a petition for a name change, but Judge Crater (no relation to the one who disappeared) won’t sign it ‘cause Pa told him he would break both his legs if he ever did, and Judge Wilkins won’t sign it because of that time out on the lake when he had a sudden attack of the middle-age crazies and tried to get my britches down and I got mad and grabbed the paddle and chased him right out of the boat.

My life is miserable because I’m stuck somewhere between being a girl and being a boy. I live in a small town where everyone knows everyone else, and I just can’t seem to escape my past. My family calls me Leroy and my friends mostly call me Laura. At school I get called Laura and Leroy and sissy and faggot and queer and every other name in the book.

No one would ever suspect that there is a Leroy somewhere under my skirts, for I am about five-six, with a good figure. I have big blue eyes and long brown hair and a pretty face and a soprano voice — well, more like alto. Thanks to the miracle of science, everything about me is just what you would expect in a seventeen-year-old girl. Except for the Problem. I make a point of not telling folks about it, but they find out soon enough, for I’m a major topic of conversation in the town.

People who don’t know treat me just like they would any other girl. Once they find out, there is a difference in the way they act towards me. Women get funny about me using the ladies’ room, and guys get distant. The ones who have been attracted to me tend to cause trouble. More than once I have had boys get ugly with me after they found out.

Johnny Ray, having learned nothing from that experience so many years ago, is still exposing me. I think he follows me in his car, awaiting an opportunity to reveal my Problem and endanger me. It happened as recently as last Saturday. “Yep,” he said to my date of the evening, while I was in the ladies’ room. “Leroy sure do make one good-lookin’ girl, don’t he?” When I got back to the table, my date was gone. No explanation, no nothing. He was just gone. He didn’t even settle the check. I paid it without complaining; it was better than having him stick around to make a scene. The waitress, who had been nice, stared at me. She looked like she wanted to say something unkind, but I was mad enough to chew nails, and I guess she could tell it, for she kept her mouth shut.

No, I had seen little girl’s. What I hadn’t seen was a little boy’s, and when I saw Johnny Ray’s and realized that his was the same as mine, I knew that something was bad wrong with my body.

I know Johnny Ray was responsible, for as I was walking to my car, he drove up in his Jetta, staying just out of grabbing range, and stuck his head out the window and told me what he had done.

Even before he and I played doctor-and-nurse in the ravine, Johnny was fascinated with me. He has always stared at me like I was a snake or something. In grade school, he would sit one row over and one desk behind me, and I would feel his hot eyes on me throughout the day. He has become more and more hateful of late; in fact, it got much worse about the time I reached puberty. Although I have never done anything bad to Johnny (not counting the milk, which I did only in self-defense), I have become his enemy, and he my nemesis. If not for Johnny continually reminding everyone about my Problem, I believe most folks would accept me as a girl.

Johnny Ray and Doc Symmons are typical of this town. I don’t think there’s anyone normal hereabouts. Mom is a hypochondriac, an over-the-counter junkie, a woman who lies in bed surrounded by empty cans of Coke and unfolded BC and Goody’s and Stanback powder papers, attempting to run the household by sheer vocal power. I’m her favorite target, “Goddam it, Leroy,” her three favorite words. She calls me Leroy and not Laura and “he” and not “she” but gives me pure-D hell if I don’t get up supper and don’t keep the house clean enough to suit her.

Pa is a long-haul driver, a man proud of his conquests of late middle-aged waitresses in truck stops in places like Iowa and North Dakota. He’s even proud of the trouble he’s having with what he calls his prostitute gland. He considers it a manly disease, unlike that of his brother Bob, who had breast cancer. It was a

source of amusement and bemusement to Pa until Bob ruined things by up and dying of it.

Lucinda, Marinda, and Clorinda, my older sisters, are the three evil stepsisters from Cinderella. I used to wish that my fairy godmother would arrive and save me from them, but what actually happened was they they grew up and got married and moved out on their own. They bother me now only on occasion, when they visit. Tammy Mae, the youngest, showed up unexpectedly when I was eight years old. I halfway keep expecting Ma to make love to Pa in a big pile of pain-reliever papers and pull another baby out of her hat, but of course she can't, 'cause she's had a hysterectomy, for which I am thankful because if she hadn't I would no doubt be a boy now instead of a girl.

Tammy Mae, precocious child that she is, has a lesbian crush on me — much to my chagrin, for my lesbian relationship with Mary June Cunningham is more than I can stand. "Get rid of your Problem," Tammy Mae cooed to me last week. "Get rid of it, and we'll run away and leave this crazy place."

I would like nothing better than to be rid of my Problem, which I consider nothing more than a tumor, but Mary June is fascinated by it, and I just know that she would leave me if I got it cut off. I'm hanging onto it for her, even though having it makes it kind of hard to have a normal lesbian relationship. Doc Symmons says there's no hurry, that I should do what makes me happy and not what makes Mary June happy. It's to help me decide what to do about my Problem that I'm writing all of this down.

My Problem stares at me with its Cyclopean eye. Little Leroy, Junior. Out of sight, out of mind. I tuck him away and pull on my white uniform and go out the door to work, to the truck stop, where a thousand carbon copies of my pa wink at me and ask me out and try to get me interested in their Problems. ■

Dallas Denny



Untitled by Teresa M. Sims

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

poetry

Franklin Abbott

Franklin Abbott is a poet and psychotherapist. He is also the editor of three anthologies *New Men*, *New Minds*, *Men and Intimacy*, and *Boyhood: Growing Up Male*.

M. Charlene Ball

M. Charlene Ball is a writer of fiction, poetry and non-fiction. She teaches English at Kennesaw University and Southern College of Technology. She lives in Atlanta.

Christine Carroll

Christine Carroll sells homes, watches birds and writes poetry in Atlanta, Georgia.

Gail Cohen

Gail Cohen is a theatrical historian and writer who lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

t. edward gray

t. edward gray was born September 18, 1970 to Lynne and Larry Gray. To these facts he adds: "after high school on to Brussels, Berlin, Moscow, learned the language and headed home, New Orleans and Austin, D., cocktail waiter, US Customs (interpreter), South America and Yucatan peninsula, fat, later thin in hospitals, Miami in the middle of the night, New York, broke to the point of depression/drink on Broadway and 103rd, fell on and off the train and landed in Atlanta, gay bookstore and two collectives under my belt, *AMETHYST*, Olympics, live with my cat."

Alexi Helligar

Alexi Helligar was born on St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. He eventually moved to Florida and graduated from Florida State University, with a degree in philosophy. He eventually moved to Atlanta to complete his first novel, *Till Kingdom Come*. He has had poetry widely published and has performed his works in multiple venues from Orlando to Santa Monica.

Terry Hook

Terry Hook is a poet from Maryland's Eastern shore. Previously published in the *Poets Domain* and other regional anthologies, she is a graduate of Salisbury State University where she was active in the Gay and Lesbian Alliance. She is currently working on a volume of poetry.

Terence E. Jackson

Terence E. Jackson is a native of Detroit, Michigan, now makes his home in Atlanta, having spent every summer growing up on his grandparent's farm. He calls himself a "Georgian country boy at heart."

R. Leigh Johnson

Tré was a poet, actor and activist who lost his battle with AIDS this spring.

Jeanne M. Leiby

Jeanne M. Leiby, a native of Michigan, received her MFA from the University of Alabama and her MA from The Bread Loaf School of English. Recently, her stories and poems have appeared in *The Greensboro Review*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *New Orleans Review* and *Passages North*. She teaches writing at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Jeff Mann

Jeff Mann teaches poetry, Southern literature, Appalachian studies and composition at Virginia Tech. He has been published in *The Laurel Review*, *The James White Review*, *Iris*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Parnassus Literary Journal* and *Amethyst*, among others.

Janell Moon

Janell Moon is a longtime resident of San Francisco where she teaches at San Francisco City College and has a private practice as a hypnotherapist. Moon won the 1995 Stonewall Chapbook Competition. Her chapbook, *Lesbian Speaker's Bureau* was published in March, 1996. She has been published in numerous journals and anthologies.

Dagmar Jill Spisak

Dagmar Jill Spisak has been publishing her poetry since her first publication in *The Common Woman* printed by Iowa City Women's Press in 1973. She has poems in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Catalyst*, *Off Our Backs*, *The Bellingham Review* and other journals as well as in numerous anthologies, including: *Wanting Women*, *Walking Between the Stars*, and *Aurora*. She has one book published in 1991 by Underground Press: *Rachel*; and has won several poetry prizes including from Atlanta Writing Resource Center, the South Carolina Writer's Workshop and Bellingham Review. She has been published in and worked with *Amethyst* since 1988 and has served as a peer reviewer for the Fulton County Arts Council.

Christopher Thomas

Christopher Thomas makes a living with prose, plays and poetry and running a corn and soybean farm in red-neck territory in Omaha, Nebraska. He has been published in *Amelia*, *Bay Windows*, *Chiron Review*, *The Evergreen Chronicles*, *Fag Rag*, *Gay Sunshine Review*, *RFD*, *James White Review* and others.

Tuscaloosa

Loved the poem, separated from your name, our apologies, please call.

fiction

Dallas Denny

Dallas Denny is the founder and executive director of the American Educational Gender Information Service, Inc., a national clearinghouse for information about gender dysphoria. She has four novels and is a songwriter as well. Her text, *Current Concepts in Transgender Identity*, will be published by Garland Publishers in 1996.

Jim Grimsley

Jim Grimsley is a prize-winning playwright who grew up in rural North Carolina. He was awarded Newsday's George Oppenheimer Award as the best new American playwright of 1988 and the Bryan Prize for Drama by the Fellowship of Southern Writers in 1993. He is playwright in residence at 7 Stages Theatre in Atlanta. His novels *Winter Birds* and *Dream Boy* were published in the last two years by Algonquin Books.

Shirlene Holmes

Shirlene Holmes lives in Atlanta and teaches theatre at Georgia State University. Her play, *A Lady and a Woman*, was originally produced by OutProud Theatre in 1994 and was recently included in an anthology of women playwrights. She has had numerous readings, productions and publications of her work over the last several years.

John Howard

John Howard was born and raised in Brandon, Mississippi, and currently resides in Atlanta. His essays and reviews have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Radical History Review*, *Southern Changes* and *Southern Historian*, among others. John wrote the introduction to the new reprint edition of Thomas Hal Phillip's classic Southern gay novel, *The Bitterweed Path* (Rhinehart, 1950, University of North Carolina Press, 1996) Portions of "Sammy, Mama and the Rest" were written while in residence at Casa Manilva (Spain) artists/writers colony, funded by Delfina Studio Trust, London.

visual art & photography

Peter Harvey

Peter Harvey divides his time between New York City and a studio on the Rhode Island Shore. "I have always believed in the supremacy of drawing. Designing for the theatre always involves an extraordinary amount of drawing. So in my paintings I also use a linear approach," says Harvey. He has been exhibiting in London, New York and New England since the 1970's.

Wendi O'Neal

Wendi O'Neal is a student at Spellman College whose work was exhibited in a student show this spring. She grew up in New Orleans.

Jim Polak

Jim Polak is a graphic designer and sometime photographer. Originally from New Jersey, he lives in Atlanta with his partner, Mark, and their cat, Stosh.

Teresa M. Sims

Teresa M. Sims' degree in photojournalism began with a great appreciation for documentary photography. She now prefers fine art photography, especially with Southwestern scenes as the subject, and finds the dramatic natural light in New Mexico well suited to black and white photography, her preferred medium of expression.

Tim Wilkerson

Tim Wilkerson has spent most of his life in the Carolinas and has lived in Atlanta just over one year. His interest in photography stems from a father who enjoyed the role of family paparazzi. Tim believes that his best work comes from a creative partnership with the model. "The most important thing I can do is free the model to imagine and experiment. I try to capture something of *who* the model is."

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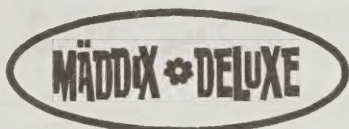
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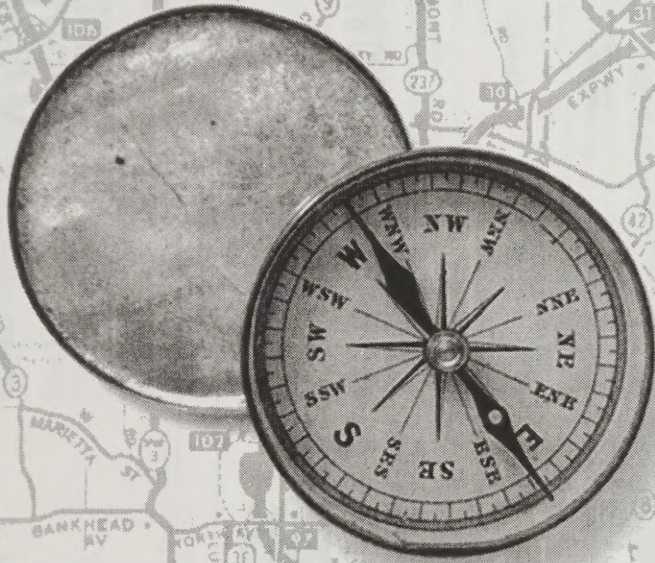
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